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Eildon manor

Eildon Manor



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EILDON MANOR.



Wilfred and the keepers discovering Burton.

THE

2

By the author of "The Life of the
Doctress, and the Secret of the
Ancient and Modern Magic
One of the most successful of the

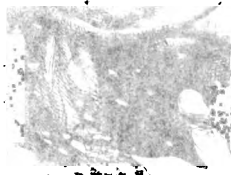
LONDON :

ROUTLEDGE, KNOX, AND ROUTLEDGE

SPRINGDON, 11, WALKER STREET, N

1902.

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...oring Burton.

EILDON MANOR,

A Tale for Girls.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE MAZE OF LIFE,"

ETC.

"Be good, sweet maid and let who will be clever;
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long:
And so make life, death, and that vast for-ever,
One grand, sweet song."—C. KINGSLEY.

LONDON :

ROUTLEDGE, WARNE, AND ROUTLEDGE,

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EILDON MANOR.

CHAPTER I.

Children seem spirits from above descended,
To whom still cleaves heaven's atmosphere serene ;
Their very wildnesses with truth are blended ;
Fresh from their skiey mould, they cannot be amended.

LLOYD.

EILDON MANOR was a well-built, substantial-looking stone house, situated, according to the topographical dictionaries, in one of the most romantic parts of England ; that is to say, in one of those fine Yorkshire dales, which still shelter the last relics in speech, mind, and manners, of those days when railways were not, and educational theories were undreamt of. The small estate upon which the mansion stood, had been long ago redeemed from its native barrenness, and now, well-wooded, and kept in good cultivation, was the pride of the neighbouring dalesmen.

Scarcely could a more picturesque landscape have been seen, than that which met Mrs. Bruce's eye as she stood in the large bay-window of her drawing-room one bright January morning. It is doubtful whether her mind was taking in the picture, but its soothing effects were perhaps perceptible in the placidity which gradually crept over a countenance before a little troubled.

Spreading before the window lay the smooth green lawn, broken by a few flower-beds, at this bleak season

totally ungarnished ; but the house having a southern aspect, chrysanthemums were trained against the sunniest walls, and in one sheltered corner the hardy arbutus and gay pyrus japonica gave a pleasant aspect to the garden. At one end of the lawn a gigantic pine-tree triumphed over its opposite neighbours, the sycamores, as one that scorned to take the rest their leafless branches were enjoying ; and a belt of Scotch firs beginning near the east end of the house, where the entrance was, ran along the side of the carriage-drive, which wound through the shrubberies and plantation until it reached the lodge and gate, that opened upon the road on which the chief traffic of the Dale was carried. The plantations were extended at the other side of this road to the beck, as a running stream is called in the Dalish tongue, which had made for itself a deep passage through the limestone rocks, and showed, by its swift running, the fall that the country was making towards the fertile lands below.

On the other side of the stream were pastures, rich in summer, and even now green and pleasant-looking from their undulating surface, which gradually sloped upwards, until they changed into rough, craggy land, where sheep alone could feed, and ended in a bold, waving outline, which at sunset stood out dark and sharp from the bright light behind ; for the sunshine early left the Dale, and its brilliant hues were soon lost, except in one place, called the Devil's Gap, where a rent in the hills showed sky and light beyond. These hills were beautiful in summer, and unlike many richer scenes, this was fine, after it had lost the flattering garb, for the outlines were there, and pleased the eye even in the cold light of January.

Of the inhabitants of the Manor House, it may be said that they were eight in number ; but if we also

count the governess, and the frequent visitor, Aunt Jane, and Nurse Matty, and old Adams, and their assistants, perhaps twice eight found a home at Eildon. But Aunt Jane was not there now, and Miss Connor was absent for her holidays ; not at home, poor thing ! she had no home, but at the school, where her young days had been chiefly spent, and where happily she always found a welcome ; and Walter Bruce was absent, the eldest son, who would have to fill the lost father's place ; he too was not at home, so the more easily may the remainder of the family be introduced.

We may as well catch the young ones as, tempted by the early sunshine, they come out of doors. First there is Wilfrid, a manly-looking boy of fifteen ; he has just emerged from the stable-yard, where he has been to fetch Nero, the Newfoundland, and he now stands amused for a few minutes, to watch the little terrier's attempts to beguile his solemn majesty into a race round the garden. Wilfrid is broad-shouldered, but not tall for his age ; he has Saxon eyes and hair, as becomes his name ; his brown clustering locks do not hide a well-developed brow, and his mouth, though heavy and somewhat wilful in expression, at times breaks out into a smile that is almost girlish in its sweetness. He soon tires of Snap's gambolling, and falls into a reverie, during which he appears to be intently occupied in driving, by a screwing process, his stick into the gravel walk. Before long, however, he is interrupted in his ingenious employment, by a very little boy who runs quickly out of the house by the hall-door, which is at this side of the house, and coming close up to Wilfrid leans forward on one of his little fat legs, that he may the better reach his respected brother's face, and says, "Please, Wilfrid, may I go with you ?"

"Holloa, young man, where did you spring from?" was the reply, in a roughish voice, that made Master Tommy tremble for the success of his petition.

"From de nursery," answered the young gentleman.

"Will you take me, Wilfrid?"

"What for?"

"I want to see Emma's pigeons."

"You can't walk so far, and I am not going to carry you."

"Yes, I can, Wilfrid," replied the offended dignity of six years old. "I walked to Cudthorpe with Sir Thomas, when I was a little boy."

"Ha, ha," laughed Wilfrid, "and I wonder what you are now, Mr. Brobdignag."

"Wilfrid," cried a girlish voice from the portico, "wait for me. I'll be ready directly."

"Very likely," said Wilfrid, turning round, "I know that means half an hour."

"It doesn't, indeed," said the young lady earnestly. She had now come as far as the corner of the house, near which Wilfrid had been standing, whilst he amused himself with little Tom's anxiety, and laid her hand upon his arm. The speaker was a girl of about fourteen, very like her brother, only that the blue eyes laughed more, and the brown, curly hair was brushed back into a rich mass beneath the net that alone kept it from falling over her shoulders. She was quite as tall as Wilfrid, but more slender, and had a good figure, which, defying all poor Miss Connor's attempts to make her carry herself well, she ran a risk of spoiling by all the awkward boyish habits that she gloried in allowing herself; and her dress was always untidy, as for instance now, her little collar was hanging by one corner down the back of her dark tweed dress, and her black silk apron attached only by one half-worn string.

Instead of replying to her entreaties, Wilfrid, merely to tease her, pointed to the unfortunate collar, which had by this time left the feebly detaining pin, and having fallen to the ground, was caught by the first gust of wind, and carried towards a door which led through a wall at right angles with the house, into the court-yard at the back of the Manor House. Through this door came opportunely at this juncture a middle-aged, respectable-looking woman, who led by the hand a young fair-haired child, in warm walking dress, also evidently a young Bruce. This person was Matty, the nurse, a Daleswoman, who retained with her native dialect much of the shrewdness and many of the superstitions that are to be found amongst her folk, and who had petted and spoiled and told stories to all this generation of the family. Matty caught sight and hold of the vagrant collar in a moment, and hastened up with it to the indifferent owner, just as the latter was saying, "Oh, never mind my collar, Will, just say you will wait for me."

"Never mind your collar, Miss Alice, d'ye say?" exclaimed Matty, indignantly. "I wonder where you'd be, if other folks were no more mindful of your things nor you are yourself. Now just bide a minute, till I get you made a bit decent, wi' your quaverings."

"Alice," called a rather fretful voice from the portico, "you're to come in, mamma says, out of the cold."

This was enforced by a tapping on the window-pane of the drawing-room; so Alice answered, "I'm coming," and then continued: "Now, Wilfrid, I have only my jacket and hat to pop on, and if you dont wait for me I will never—" she stopped a minute for a dreadful threat, but Wilfrid only laughed defiantly, and was pretending to go on; so she subsided into a coaxing

tone, and said, "Oh, Wilfrid, do ; because Kate is going ; and if you won't wait, I shall have to walk all stuck up with her."

"For shame, Alice, to speak so of Katharine," exclaimed the young girl on the steps. She was evidently a sister, though, apparently, a little younger, a little shorter, and very different in appearance from the other ; for Margaret's face was oval and sallow, she had a long nose, dark hair, and grey eyes, deeply set beneath a finely-formed but rather low forehead. She looked rather peevish, and not robust, or she might, from the chiselled features and expressive eyes, have been called a handsome girl, or, at least, one of those girls that you say will be a fine-looking woman some day.

"Get out of the way, Meg ; I haven't time for any palavering," cried Alice, as she ran towards the house, with a slight push flew past Margaret, and then straight upstairs, to fulfil her promise of being equipped in no time. Margaret was left in a state of virtuous indignation, which she expended in reflection for a minute or two, and then rejoined her mother in the drawing-room.

How much delay Wilfrid's good-nature would have endured is doubtful, for his attention was speedily engrossed by a struggle which had begun between Tommy and his nurse on the subject of the walk ; Matty insisting that Master Tom must accompany her and his sister in a nice walk through the grounds, and Tom as stoutly persisting that he was engaged to go with his brother to Cudthorpe. At last she appealed to the latter.

"Now, Master Wilfrid, you're never going to be so rampagious as to take this bit of a child on one of your dangerous expeditions. You mustn't, indeed. If he came back safe, I'm morally convinced his two shoes wouldn't, and, besides—"

"Fiddle de dee, Matty," interrupted Wilfrid; "you make a perfect baby of the boy. He can go with us well enough. We are only going straight to Cudthorpe and back."

"To Cudthorpe!" echoed Matty; "the very place he shouldn't go to, for Sir Thomas has no more sense nor a child himself, and he's sure to give him things that are no ways proper for him."

"Let me go," lisped little Minnie, now pushing her way between them.

"Nay, nay," cried Mrs. Matty, snatching the little girl up in her arms. "At any rate, I keep you by my side. And, Master Wilfrid, please take notice, if any harm happens to your brother Tom, remember I've warned you."

This solemn announcement only provoked a loud laugh on the part of the incorrigible Wilfrid, and Alice appearing at this moment fully equipped, with dog-whip and whistle in her hand, he only added, "All right, Matty," and prepared to set off, Tom and Alice following.

"Why, Will, you are never going to take Tom with us?" was Alice's first remark.

"Why not?" said Wilfrid, without turning his head.

"Oh, it is ridiculous," said Alice.

"Well, if you object," said Wilfrid, striding on, "you must wait for Kate, and must walk in state, and hold open the gate, and say, 'please Kate,' in tones sedate, and then you'll be late, as sure as fate."

Alice would scarcely laugh, as it was intended she should do, at this exercise of school-boy wit, but she submitted, and as for the little object of all this discussion, he first made a grimace of triumph over his shoulder at old Matty, and then, by the help of a hawthorn stick that the gardener had given him, he

tried to emulate the long strides of his brother, and failing in the attempt trotted after him, as happy as a king.

The party had only just turned the corner of the plantation and become lost to view, when another member of the family in her turn passed through the portico. This was Katharine, Miss Bruce, the eldest daughter, a young lady who both knew and exercised her privileges. She was tall, lady-like, and in face a pleasant mixture of Margaret and Alice, having light brown hair, blue eyes, strongly marked features, and a mouth that, had it not been haughty, would have been sweet. She came out well and carefully dressed, but with her little muff under her arm, because she was in the act of drawing on her gloves, and with rather an anxious air, as if looking for somebody. Apparently surprised to find no one near the door, she hastened to the corner of the house, then stopped a minute, looked around and called, "Alice," "Wilfrid," more than once. At the sound of her voice, Matty, who with her single charge had been in another part of the garden, now came round and said,

"You'll have to run, most likely, Miss Katharine, or else you'll not catch them. They'll be nigh the gates by now."

"Has Alice gone?" asked Katharine in a tone of irritation.

"Yes, honey, to be sure. She's off with Master Wilfrid, and they've taken my bairn with them. I'm sure I'm no ways easy about him. I wish, Miss Katharine, my love, you would look sharp and keep them in sight."

"I shall go and tell mamma," said Katharine, whose annoyance was almost too great for words.

"Nay, never heed vexing your mamma with it,

Miss Katharine," said Matty in a soothing tone, but it was too late, the young lady had turned back to the house, passed through the hall door, closed it behind her with a bang, and rushed into the drawing-room, almost before Matty had done speaking.

"Mamma, they have all gone and left me; and they have taken little Tom with them," were her first hurried words on entering the room.

Mrs. Bruce, a gentlewoman of pleasant face and quiet manners, was sitting at one end of a sofa that was drawn up near the fire, occupied with some fancy-work, for which the materials were upon a small table that stood in front of her. The room was handsomely furnished in old-fashioned style; but litter of various kinds scattered about, from an old cap of Wilfrid's to the broken inhabitants of a Noah's ark, gave it rather an untidy air. The space about the fireplace, however, adorned with some fine old Dresden china (protected from meddling fingers by its position on the high mantelshelf), a large dark picture, containing the portraits of a group of Bruces of bygone days, made comfortable by a very large, warm rug, the sofa, and some easy chairs, and occupied by Mrs. Bruce herself, in quiet attitude, wrapped in an Indian shawl, and engrossed with her thoughts or her Berlin work, looked very home-like.

As Katharine, however, burst in, and poured out her grievance, Mrs. Bruce's placid look gave way to a troubled expression. Poor woman! she had often looked troubled since the fatal illness which, five years ago, had carried off the husband who had before so carefully shielded her from anxiety. Her own health, injured by sorrow, had ever since that time been so delicate as to make her still more unfit than she was by her gentle nature, to cope with the unruly spirits of

her numerous family. Walter was the only one of her children who had as yet been a real comfort to her. At the time of his father's illness, he had been pursuing his studies at college, with good hope of ultimate distinction. Being unexpectedly sent for to attend his parent's death-bed, his studies were thus so disturbed, that when in the end he took his degree, his standing was not so high as had been anticipated: when, however, he left the university for the foreign tour which, by his father's wish, was to complete his education, it was with a name untarnished and beloved. The same character had remained with him; absence had but rendered him more dear, and his return was now longed for. In fact, he might be considered already on his way home; for, after being in the Holy Land, he was now at Rome, but he did not seem inclined to hasten his steps in the wished-for direction.

Mrs. Bruce would have concluded that the magnificence of St. Peter's and the Vatican, the more classic glories of the ancient city, or the charms of the intellectual society into which the young Englishman had been introduced, were quite sufficient to account for the delay, and would have contented herself with believing that he was happy, and amidst the means of improvement, had not Aunt Jane, more clear-sighted in such matters, read in Walter's frequent allusions to a General Du Port, with whom he had contracted a great intimacy, and the mention, at first repeated, lately dropped, of the General's daughter, a reason for the fascination of the Holy City. At first he had spoken of excursions taken with the General and his daughter; afterwards of Miss Du Port's lively remarks, or her excellent horsemanship; but of late these had ceased, and the simple "We" used instead; from which, as interpreted by Aunt Jane, enough was gleaned to

render Mrs. Bruce uneasy ; and, shortly before the time at which our story opens, she had written to her son a letter, which she hoped would induce him to open his heart to her, and, in waiting for the answer, her uneasiness had abated. Indeed, the little worries of every day were engrossing enough to chase any but a great anxiety from her mind. Six children, each of independent character and much self-will, loving their mother dearly, and influenced by her quiet goodness, but needing for their good discipline a stronger hand over them than hers could ever be, kept her sufficiently employed. Of their guardians, her assistants, one, Mr. Swinton, a brother of her own, lived in Northumberland, and was immersed in his own affairs ; the other, Sir Thomas Gresley, was a good-natured bachelor, whose great wish was to see every one about him happy, and whose only puzzle seemed to be why having their own way, and every indulgence, did not always make them so. On this point, Sir Thomas Gresley was always at issue with his sister, Miss Lavinia, who, though kind-hearted in the main, had been early soured with the world, and was now what Wilfrid and his saucy sister called " a starched old maid."

Many and many a person, far and near, might have been called upon to bear witness to the old maid's good offices ; at the same time it is true that a stiff demeanour, some stout prejudices, and a rather acid temper, had made Miss Gresley anything but a favourite with the young people at the Manor House, whilst it was a frequent complaint from her own nieces, the two Indian orphans, who had in reality found in her a second mother, that " Aunt Lavinia is so cross, she will scarcely let us do anything."

It was partly to see these children, partly to get some favour out of Sir Thomas Gresley, that this

morning's expedition had been undertaken by the younger ones ; and it was to pay a more formal visit to her godmother as well as to take a message from her mamma, that Miss Bruce was to have led the party ; and as the message was to borrow a pattern of work that her mamma particularly wanted, Katharine felt, as she stood impatiently waiting for Mrs. Bruce's answer, that her case was a strong one. She did not expect to be able to work her mother up into indignation, that must be all her own, but, as she expected, it was with a very troubled air that Mrs. Bruce looked up and echoed, "Taken little Tom ! What could Alice be thinking of ?"

"And left me, mamma," said Katharine, thinking her own grievance slighted ; "so I cannot get your pattern, and I shall have no walk at all to-day."

"The child will be tired to death," pursued Mrs. Bruce ; "why did Matty allow it ? Margaret, my dear, ring the bell."

Margaret had all this time been sitting on a low stool at one side of the fireplace, with a book and her elbows in her lap, and her head resting on both hands ; she now raised one of them awkwardly, and put it behind her to catch the bell-rope, but was stopped by Katharine, who said hastily,

"You need not, Meg. Matty is out with Minnie, and she knows that Tom has gone. You know, mamma, nothing can stop Wilfrid, and Alice always encourages him."

"Yes, my dear Katharine," said Mrs. Bruce, with a sigh, "Alice is thoughtless, I know. I wish Miss Connor had come back again. I am almost sorry that I gave her the extra week, and yet if her brother was going to India so soon——"

"But, mamma," said Katharine, interrupting, "if

Miss Connor had been here, it is very likely everything would have happened just the same, because Wilfrid can always outwit her if he tries, only I should have had her to walk with me, and now——Margaret, you must come with me.”

“Oh, Kate, I cannot,” answered Margaret, opening her eyes at this sudden demand, “I have a headache.”

“And you want to finish that story, I see,” said Katharine unceremoniously ; but observing that a black look was rapidly coming over her sister’s face, and knowing of old that it was not wise to drive her to extremity, she changed her tone, and added, more softly, “Come, Meg, you might ; I know that Elinor will like to see you.”

“Elinor is a silly stupid,” muttered Margaret, though half-relenting. “Why can’t you go by yourself, Katharine ?—there is Tommy Sikes’, and Mary Metcalfe’s, and the school, and Sonny sides, and men working in the fields all the way.”

“You don’t suppose that I am frightened, child,” cried Katharine ; “but fancy what Miss Lavinia would think if I arrived at Cudthorpe quite alone. It would look strange indeed.”

A scornful smile of incredulity was upon Margaret’s lip, for Katharine’s courage was not renowned in the household, but Mrs. Bruce, probably foreseeing mischief, here hastily interposed, and said to Margaret quietly, “A walk would do you good, my dear ; I think you had better put your hat on, and go with Katharine.”

“This is always the way,” murmured Margaret, half to herself ; but she closed her book, and getting up, slowly and unwillingly obeyed.

Katharine ought to have been satisfied with this concession, but her amiability was not restored, and she spent the next ten minutes in alternately walking to the foot of the staircase to call Margaret, and in grum-

bling to her mother about the many injuries under which she had lately laboured—the overturning of her drawing portfolios, by which several of the sketches were much rubbed ; the losing of her silver pencil-case, the breaking of a piano string, and the teaching of many mischievous and vulgar tricks to both Snap, the terrier, and little Tom, all of which were to be attributed to the united efforts of Wilfrid and his sister Alice, as well as to the absence of Miss Connor.

“Well, my dear,” said Mrs. Bruce with a sigh, “your brother’s holidays will soon be over, and in a few days Miss Connor will be here ; and in the meantime, my dear Katharine, I wish you would try to be more patient, and to speak more gently. It grieves me to see you so cross with the younger ones.”

It is probable that Katharine would have tried to justify herself under her mother’s deserved rebuke ; but at this moment Margaret appeared, and Katharine could not lose the opportunity of reproaching her for her tardiness.

“I was looking for my gloves,” said Margaret, moodily. “Sarah says, that she believes Wilfrid took one of them yesterday, to clean his gun with, and I have been obliged to put on my best ones.”

“So much the better,” said Katharine, looking complacently at her own well-fitted hands.

“If they are warm enough,” said Mrs. Bruce, getting up to inspect Margaret’s attire in this respect, and finishing with a kiss. “Now you had better lose no more time, and Katharine, my dear, pray bring them all back in time for dinner.”

Katharine shrugged her shoulders, as much as to say that it would not depend much on her ; however, she did say, “Yes, if I can, mamma,” and then the two girls set off together.

CHAPTER II.

The snows arise, and foul and fierce
All winter drives along the darkened air.

THOMSON.

It was with more of pride and fondness, than reproach, that Mrs. Bruce watched her two wilful daughters, as with the free firm step of those bred in the country they passed down the garden, and were soon lost to her view. They were both quick walkers, at least Katharine was, and Margaret might keep up with her as best she could; and one advantage was that the rapid exercise through the brisk frosty air seemed to dissipate their ill-humours, and although not much conversation passed between them, they were soon on more friendly terms than might have been expected from their previous altercation.

Once out of their own grounds, the road was quite straight for some distance. Margaret would have varied it by a short cut through Throstle-gill, but her sister prudently declined short cuts unescorted as they were, and trusted that Margaret was wrong in her assurance that the children would certainly have chosen the less stupid though more rugged route. So they plodded along the road, meeting few passengers, but exchanging a friendly salutation with all those whom they did see.

The road had been chiefly cut out of the hill-side, and on the left hand, as they walked along, the ground rose in a craggy steep, ending in wide pasture-lands covered with the short herbage cropped by the hardy mountain sheep, and on the other sloped down towards

the stream, which ran almost parallel with the road. The opposite side of the valley was much the same until you came about a mile lower down, where the village of Sonnysides lay, and the valley began to be clothed with fir plantations. Under the shelter of these plantations, and apparently surrounded by them, lay Cudthorpe, Sir Thomas Gresley's house, not much more than a mile from Eildon, if you could cross the stream direct; but as this was impossible except in the heat of summer, when the beck was nearly dry. Katharine and Margaret had to walk on some distance until they reached the one-arched bridge, which was the only civilized means of crossing within five miles of Sonnysides.

Half-way up the hill, beyond the bridge, was the school that Margaret had mentioned as one of Katharine's safeguards in case she walked alone; and as they passed the open door, the hum of busy learners, and the master's loud uplifted voice, bore witness to the industry of the occupants. This was not one of the well-built Gothic or Tudor edifices of the present day,—well ventilated, carefully boarded, and governed by the enlightened rule of a certificated master,—but only a low room in Abraham Peacock's house, where his father had kept school for fifty years, and his mother's father had done the same for perhaps fifty more. Neither grammar, composition, nor geography were taught in Abraham's school, but better cipherers and writers could not be met with throughout the Dale than Abraham turned out, both amongst boys and girls; and if his voice was loud and stern, and his hand somewhat heavy when exasperated, his scholars learnt what was of value to them all their lives, and that was to behave themselves, sit still, and do as they were bid,—old-fashioned virtues that Mr. Peacock took

good care that they should practise during the six hours that were daily spent under his control.

The girls had passed the school, and were toiling up the hill that led to Sonnysides, when they came upon a little lad, sitting close under the hedge, and crying loudly.

"What is the matter, boy?" said Katharine, stopping to speak to him; but she got no answer at first except a louder blubber, whilst he attempted to wipe his eyes with his blue checked pinafore; so Katharine tried again: "What do they call you?" upon which the boy sobbed out, "Peggy Joe Ned."

"Well, but what do they call your father?" said Katharine again; "Joe what?"

"Joe Rudd," said the boy.

"And what are you crying for?"

"Mother strapped me."

"What for? what had you been doing?"

"Nobbut laking, mum."

Now a young lady from London would, probably, have been as much puzzled as a Frenchman to understand Margaret and Joseph Rudd's son's account of the offence for which he had incurred his mother's ire; but Katharine having been nursed by Matty, and brought up amongst these Dalesfolk, knew very well that he meant to say, "Only playing, ma'am." So she remarked severely, "Playing instead of going to school, I dare say," and a fresh burst of sorrow giving consent, she continued: "Well, why don't you go now and be a good boy?"

"I daurn't," said the boy; "master'd give me t'stick."

"Poor fellow," said Margaret, who had been fumbling in her pocket for some time; "here is a penny for you."

"What nonsense, Margaret," said Katharine, sharply ; "they say there are some of the worst boys in the neighbourhood at the top of this hill, and this is one of them, most probably."

"Na, I isn't," said the boy, who had been revived by the penny, and felt equal to defending himself from the injustice of the charge.

In the meantime Mr. Peacock, the schoolmaster, having wished for a nearer view of the young ladies, whom he had seen passing the open door, or it might be only that he was oppressed by the stifling unsweet atmosphere of his peopled hive, and wished to refresh himself by a whiff of the pure morning air, had come to the outside of his house, and as he stood there looking round him, he quickly recognised in the young ladies his former pupils, the Misses Bruce, and, in the boy to whom they were speaking, his young truant, Neddy Rudd. Without delay he hastened up to them, and after making his best bow to Katharine, said suavely—

"Good morning, ladies, this is a fine bracing morning for your exercise." Then aside to Master Rudd, "I see you, you young varmint ;" and was about to resume his observations upon the weather, when Margaret broke in with—

"Oh ! Mr. Peacock, please, this boy is afraid to come to your school because he thinks you will beat him, and he dare not go home to his mother because she has been beating him, so will you let him come without ?"

"I would do so at your request, I'm 'sure, Miss Margaret," answered Mr. Peacock, in his broad, homely accent ; "but you know it is true what the wise man said, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child,' for you perceive if that lad found that he could play truant

without catching his deserts to-day, I'll warrant you he'd go and do the same to-morrow."

"I winna," said the boy, beginning to cry again, as well he might, at the prospect before him.

But Katharine now began to be tired of the affair, particularly since Margaret had begun to take the lead, so she said, "It is no use interfering, Margaret, let Mr. Peacock take the boy back to school, and do what he thinks best with him."

The worthy schoolmaster highly approved of Miss Bruce's excellent judgment, and praised her much as he might have done her round-hand copy, in the days when he had gone up to the Manor House to give the young ladies writing lessons with their brothers, and then invited them, as a rest, to turn back and inspect his school. This, however, being declined with a scarcely concealed feeling of disgust at the idea, the young ladies proceeded in one direction, whilst Mr. Peacock, followed by the culprit, turned back in the other.

All this time more than one curly head had been popping out of the doorway, and two adventurous spirits had even advanced as far as the window-sill; but no sooner had the parting bow been given, than the heads disappeared as if by magic, and it is to be hoped for their own sakes, that they all got safely back to their seats without the catastrophe of a fallen inkstand or a blotted copy to betray their exploits.

"Let us call in and see how old Debby's rheumatics are, Katharine," said Margaret, as they entered the straggling street that formed the village of Sonnysides.

"We have no time for that," answered Katharine, so decidedly that Margaret was obliged to give up the idea, and to follow her sister, contriving, however, to do that in rather a provoking manner, dropping behind to

look in the hedgerows for skeleton leaves, or large fir-cones, or any other curiosity, half to tease Katharine, half for her own amusement. After waiting for Margaret, and complaining several times, Katharine at last got out of all patience, and being now fairly in sight of Cudthorpe, she assumed an extra tone of dignity, and saying, "Very well, Margaret, then I shall leave you," walked quickly on alone.

"She won't go into the house without me, I know," said Margaret to herself, "or Miss Lavinia would scold her for not taking care of the children, as she calls us, and then she amiably sauntered on, as slowly as she liked, sometimes humming a tune, sometimes looking up at the curious forms the clouds were assuming, until at last she fell into a deep reverie, of which poor boys and their miseries formed the principal subject. From this she was roused by a familiar voice calling out, "Hoy, Peg, where are you bound for?" and looking up, she saw to her annoyance that she had passed, by some yards, the gate that led to Cudthorpe, and had thus made herself the laughing-stock of Wilfrid, Alice, and Elinor Gresley, who were standing upon the wall, full of fun at her expense.

"So you and her ladyship have had a flare-up," said Alice, laughing. "Come in, Meg, and tell us all about it."

"There is nothing to tell," said Margaret, rather sullenly; "I did not want to walk so fast, that was all."

"Never mind, Margaret, let us leave them," said Elinor Gresley, a tall, pale-faced, pleasant-looking girl, who was, in default of a more congenial companion, a sort of friend of Margaret's, and arm-in-arm the two walked on together.

The road led through the midst of the plantations until they came out suddenly in front of the substantial

iron gates that opened into the court-yard of the old brick house, which had no outward beauties to recommend it, but was full of comfort and hospitality within.

Here, in the court-yard, were standing Katharine and Miss Gresley, who was a tall, prim, stately lady, both of whom were watching a little girl, with pretty face and soft dark hair, who was showing Tommy Bruce how quickly the pigeons came down at her call to eat the peas she bountifully scattered for them.

Miss Gresley turned round sharply when she heard the gates swing back, and seeing the two girls, she held out her hand, and said, "How d'ye do, Margaret? I have just been telling your sister that she had no business to leave you straying about the lanes by yourself. A sad dawdler you are, I fear. You want your governess back again, I think, though she is but a young thing. Tommy, keep your feet out of that pool of water. Bless the boy, he is over his shoe-tops. I told my brother what it would be if he did not have the yard mended before winter came."

Master Tommy had been walking backwards, with his hands behind him, and his eyes fixed upon two coy birds, that, resisting all entreaties, would stay upon the spout of the highest part of the house, and in so doing he had reached the edge of a muddy slough that had collected in one corner of the court-yard. At the sharp sound of Miss Gresley's admonition, Tommy started, and looking round, his foot slipped, and he fell, with much of his little person in the mire.

His friend Emma was ready to cry, for she knew that even to dirty your shoes was a great offence in the eyes of her Aunt Lavinia, but she generously ran forward directly to help him up, and in so doing came in for a little mud and some scolding.

"Heyday! what now?" cried a welcome voice

outside the gates, and in another minute the good-natured Sir Thomas Gresley came amongst them, followed by Wilfrid and Alice, who had met with him upon their way. "My young namesake in the duck-pond? Did you push him in, little one?" he continued, with a chuck under the chin to Emma, and rapid salutations to the others.

"A duck-pond!" exclaimed Miss Lavinia, horrified. "Nay, brother, if that be your object in leaving the place so long unrepaired, I have no more to say, and we may as well send this naughty boy into the kitchen to be dried."

Tommy, being held at arm's length by Miss Lavinia, so as to exhibit at the greatest advantage to the spectators his plaid tunic and clean collar all bespattered, now began to cry. This was a sight Sir Thomas could never bear, so he took the culprit into his own custody, and said, in a consoling way,—

"Nay, man, you must not break down for a tumble; you will never make a huntsman if you mind a little mud. Your cloth will brush, I suppose. Come and let us see what Aunt Lavinia's closets will produce; I know that there was a baking of gingerbread yesterday."

Tommy did not refuse the pleasant proposal, and was willingly led into the house, followed by the young ladies, and Miss Lavinia, who groaned much over the dirty shoes, and her brother's propensity to spoil every child he came near. Most reluctantly she was furthermore obliged to see little Tom taken into the dining-room, and, after being placed upon the hearth-rug beside Ranger, the old pointer, and before a blazing fire, his hands filled with spice nuts, and his pockets lined with a silver sixpence, which he was advised to spend before it could burn them. Meanwhile the three younger girls retired into the deep bay-window,

and began to talk fast in low tones, and Katharine, who had been much chagrined at her reception, and little Tom's troublesome accident, now delivered her mother's message. As few things pleased Miss Lavinia more than being asked for a pattern or recipe, this restored her good-humour greatly, and she invited Katharine to accompany her to her dressing-room, where in one side of the huge oak-wardrobe such things were stored.

It was a rare treat to be allowed to enter this room, and there were some shelves filled with treasures upon which Katharine cast a longing eye. Old brocaded dresses, cardinals, and bibs and tuckers, that had belonged to Lady Gresleys long ago, peeped out from the cloths in which they were pinned up, Indian curiosities, and old-fashioned silver things, revived a strong desire that the young Bruces had from childhood felt to ransack this old wardrobe. Katharine, however, did not feel brave enough to remind Miss Lavinia of a promise that some day they should see them all unfolded; so she was obliged to content herself with helping to select a pattern, and submit to see the great doors closed again. Then Katharine began to cast some furtive glances upon the wall above the fire-place, where various strange old miniatures were placed.

"The portrait of your great-grandfather, my dear," said Miss Lavinia, graciously, as she noticed Katharine's eye fixed upon one of them. "It is painted upon ivory, and was given by himself to the beautiful but weak Lavinia of our house, and has been in our possession ever since."

Many times had Katharine looked upon this little picture with great interest, for she knew that it represented one of her ancestors, and she felt convinced that there was some history attached to it. She now advanced a few steps nearer, in the faint hope that

... more about it. To
... ed:--
... frame, arrived at an
... to profit by the
... therefore, although
... weakness that let the
... self to sink into the
... her health, I will
... it."

... ears, ready to receive
... instruction from the story.
... of our Lord is—," commenced
... with her fore-finger to the
... text-book, "that the young Wilfrid
... like so many
... in the service of
... an Englishwoman,
... the young Wilfrid. The
... of distinction,
... of the capital.
... of his birth, and soon
... his own master,
... of his
... it is not
... a visitor at our
... time, consisted
... son Ralph and
... at all times
... here. Miss Layton
... satisfaction at
... for she had never
... old lady's features,
... the hastiness of
... in figure, furrowed
... had set down Miss



The Miniature.

Miss Lavinia would say something more about it. To her surprise, her godmother continued :—

“You have now, my dear Katharine, arrived at an age when you ought to have judgment to profit by the experience of your elders, and, therefore, although deploring painfully as I do, the weakness that led the last Lavinia Gresley to allow herself to sink into the grave without an effort to preserve her health, I will open the sad tale for your benefit.”

Katharine stood with open ears, ready to receive amusement at least, if not instruction, from the story.

“It was in the year of our Lord 17—,” commenced Miss Gresley, pointing with her fore-finger to the portrait as her text-book, “that the young Wilfrid Bruce came to England. His father, like so many needy Scottish gentlemen, had been in the service of the French king, but had married an Englishwoman, who died soon after the birth of the young Wilfrid. The youth was educated like a Frenchman of distinction, and introduced into the gayest society of the capital. But he did not love the country of his birth, and soon after the death of his father left him his own master, he came over to England to visit some relations of his mother. As they lived near to Cudthorpe, it is not surprising that young Bruce became a visitor at our house. The Cudthorpe family, at that time, consisted of Sir Thomas and Lady Gresley, their son Ralph and only daughter Lavinia. Beauty has been at all times the heritage of the Gresley females”—here Miss Lavinia gave herself a little pull-up of inward satisfaction, at which Katharine smiled to herself, for she had never considered how well-cut were the old lady’s features, nor how fine still her eyes, but, with the hastiness of youth, had only marked the thin figure, furrowed cheeks, and wrinkled brow, and had set down Miss



The Miniature.

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Lavinia, in the children's phrase, as "ugly"—"and the Miss Gresley of that day was no exception to the rule. She is said to have been fair and tall, with a profusion of golden hair which, when unbanded, would fall around her like a veil ; her eyes were deep blue, her mouth and nose small and beautiful, and her voice exceeding sweet, But mark, Katharine, how useless were all these charms when unaccompanied by activity or strength of mind. No piece of work of hers has descended down to us, nor is there one recipe of her hand-writing in our family cookery-book ; indeed, it is believed that she had been petted and indulged to the uttermost by her foolish parents, and that she spent most of her time in reading the idle romances of the period. No doubt she was always making herself out a heroine like those in her silly books ; and when young Bruce came, with his accomplishments, and French politeness, no wonder that she fell in love with him at once, and supposing that her beauty had done as sudden execution, made sure that the handsome soldier was at her feet. He was often at this house, and it was that time that he gave Lavinia his picture, which makes me think that your great-grandfather, Katharine, was not quite blameless in the matter, for young men have no business to be idling away their time beside young women, let alone giving their portrait to them, unless they mean it to be a regular courtship. However that may be, it is certain that after a time, Wilfrid went farther north to see his kindred, and then the young lady began to mope and pine until the youth came back again. It was now that Ralph came home, and Wilfrid was introduced to him as the understood admirer of his sister. They became good friends, and Ralph assisted him to inspect the property across the water, which was his inheritance

from his mother's family, and he soon announced his intention of living upon the estate, and began to plan the mansion which he intended to build upon it. Lavinia was now quite bright again, full of hope and love, I suppose—poor silly thing, to give her heart before it was asked for—when all at once it came out that it was no Lavinia, but a certain Katharine Graham, who was to be the mistress of the new house—a young lady who had been educated in a French convent, and to whom Wilfrid had been betrothed from infancy. Lavinia swooned away when she heard the news, as all the girls in her books would have done, but unhappily it did not end there. She had nothing to fall back upon, the 'play was o'er' for her, and her health, both of body and mind, failed from that period. She used to wander about pale and quiet up and down the hill-sides, mourning, it is said, over her own weakness, for about a year, and then she died."

"And Wilfrid, the wretch," exclaimed Katharine, "what became of him?"

"He was your great-grandfather, remember, my dear," continued the old lady. "Ralph took it much as you have done. He challenged Wilfrid the very day he heard about the Scotch young lady. They met in deadly combat, and Ralph was wounded, though not severely. They had some explanation afterwards by which Ralph was quite satisfied, and although separated for a time, they became close friends afterwards. Wilfrid's life, however, was saddened by the thought that he had, although unconsciously, been the means of blighting Lavinia's life, and his marriage did not take place for three years at least. By Ralph's exertions, Sir Thomas and Lady Gresley then became reconciled to him, changed, grave, and wise as he had grown, and the families have remained closely united ever since."

Miss Lavinia paused, the tear of sympathy was in Katharine's eye, and for once her godmother did not reprove the sentiment, but laid her hand upon Katharine's shoulder with something like a sigh, and added in her usual firm voice, "If Lavinia Gresley had looked for her duties, and tried to perform them, she would have been a happier woman, Katharine. Now let us go back to the children." Arrived downstairs again, they found Margaret and Elinor still talking in the bay-window, with Emma, not quite admitted to their companionship, divided between them and little Tom, who, now quite dry, was squatted upon the hearth-rug, on good terms with its rightful owner. The stable clock was chiming half-past one as they came downstairs, so Katharine hastened to summon Margaret and Tom, and to take her leave, expecting to find the others somewhere about the court or stable-yard. Meeting Gregory, an old servant, just outside the door, Katharine inquired of him, and, to her surprise, heard that they had left the house "aboun half an hour ago, and would maist like be nigh at home by now."

It was very annoying ; however, there was nothing to be done but to set off quickly in the same direction, though without the least expectation of overtaking them. The having Tommy to take care of was the principal grievance, it was both mischievous and mean of Wilfrid and Alice to slip away from him ; however, the child himself was in a very good humour, and with hold of Margaret's hand, trotted away famously, talking without ceasing all the way. The first difficulty was when they got to Sonnysides, where Tommy wanted to spend his sixpence in sweetmeats at the shop. Katharine refused at first, so Margaret called her unkind, and said that she would stay with him ; during the discussion Tommy ran into the shop, so the

girls could do no other than follow him. Being the only shop in the village, this was the post-office, general store place, and repository of news, and was kept by a good-natured, talkative woman called Middlemas.

"You'll have got a visitor up at Eildon, Miss Bruce," said she, after the first greetings had been exchanged, and she was weighing a quantity of pink and brown sugar bullets for Master Tommy.

"No, Jenny," replied Katharine; "what makes you think so?"

"Nobbut t'post-chay from Thorpe, Miss Bruce. It come up the road afore noon to-day. Our 'Duke seed it, and t' man tellt him they were gannin tuv Eildon."

"Indeed!" said Katharine, quite interested. "I wonder who it could be."

"Oh, Kate," cried Margaret, "could it be Walter?"

"Nay, not Mister Walter," put in the good woman, "for 'Duke said it was a lady at was in't t'inside, but they went at sike a pace, he couldn't get a glint of wha she might be."

"We must go home as fast as possible," said Katharine. "Come, Tommy, you have bought quite enough to make you ill already."

"I want some acid drops for Minnie," said Tom, who was of a generous disposition.

"Nonsense, Tommy," said Katharine; "come along."

But Master Tommy had a will as well as his eldest sister, and he waited for his acid drops, which Mrs. Middlemas considerably packed up as quickly as she could, for, as she said, "I wish you were safe up at Eildon, Miss Bruce, t'clouds has been hanging about all t'day. 'Duke says he suddent be surprised if we have a fall before night, and may be suner."

"Oh, surely it will keep fair until we get home," said Katharine, going to the door, and looking out

anxiously, for the people about here were all weather-wise, and at Cudthorpe they had prophesied snow before morning. "It does not look so bad," she continued, putting her head in again; "there is a gleam of sunshine. However, come, children, we must make haste. Good afternoon, Jenny."

"Good day t'ye," returned the woman; and they pursued their way.

And now they hastened through the village, without stopping to speak to any one else, and Katharine took hold of Tommy's other hand, to help him on the better. Every now and then, however, there was a delay that they were obliged to submit to, for Tommy would keep stopping to open his paper of bullets, and cautiously extract three at a time, one for Katharine, one for Margaret, and one for himself; and they dared not refuse him, for fear that his good-humour as well as his strength should begin to flag.

In spite of the bullets and his sisters' help, by the time they had crossed the bridge, and got upon the weary, straight road that led to the Manor House, Tommy confessed himself so tired that he could scarcely walk a step further.

Margaret wanted to carry him; but this Katharine had the sense to see would be very imprudent, and would not permit it; nevertheless, she took him in her own arms for a little way; but he was heavy, and she, not used to such a burden, was soon obliged to set him down again. And now they began to be sensible that the weather had changed. The brief gleam of sunshine that had cheered them in the village had quite disappeared, the air was chill, and a gust of wind whistled past them now and then.

In the gloominess of a coming storm, the valley looked bleak and desolate, the pine-trees on the edge

of the hills in one direction stood out like gaunt skeletons from the lurid sky, whilst overhead there was nothing but heavy greyness. Tom could not possibly walk quickly now, and his pride having once given way, there was no hope of his strength holding out much longer.

On other days, as Margaret said, they were tired of meeting coal-carts, but to-day there were none. The carrier never came on a Monday, so it was no use looking out for the covered waggon, in which Tom could have sat so comfortably. If that post-chaise would only come back again, they might employ it to carry them all home ; but it did not appear, so there was no resource but to lay all the blame upon Wilfrid and Alice, and drag Tommy along. Presently the storm came in earnest. First a shower of hail, beating sharply against their faces : no wonder that Tom fairly cried, and could scarcely get on at all. Dales-girls as they were, and having been out in many a stormy day before, they would almost have enjoyed it, had they not had the poor child with them. After a while the hail turned into snow, and came down in such large flakes that they were almost blinded, and it was well that the road was quite straight before them,

"Fancy the shepherds, Kate," said Margaret. "They are sometimes out for hours in storms like this. I know now how they feel."

"I could do without the experience," said Katharine, shortly, and Margaret kept the rest of her fancies to herself.

"I wish I was at home," roared Tommy, more and more loudly, until at last Katharine stopped to take breath, and to put down the corner of her shawl, and to say, "Really, Tommy, you might stop this crying ; it is bad enough to have to drag you along without that."

The little boy only took advantage of the pause to cry the more ; but happily at this moment a countryman came in sight round the corner of the road, which took a little turn just there, and quickly advanced to their assistance.

"Can I help you, mum," said he ; "this is a plain day for you to be out in. Oh, it's Miss Bruce, mum."

"Yes, Robinson," said Katharine, recognising the man as a labourer who lived near to Eildon ; "we have been caught in the storm. Could you carry Master Tom ? he is so tired."

"Aye, to be sure," said the man, heartily ; and in another minute the little boy was hoisted upon his shoulder, and borne rapidly in the right direction. The way seemed short now ; indeed, they had already toiled on three-quarters of a mile, and were not very far from home, and in ten minutes more they had the comfort of walking up to their own hall-door, and of breathing the delicious warmth that met them as they opened it.

"Oh, my dears, is that you ?" said a lady who was crossing the hall at that moment. "I told mamma I was sure that you would set off ; but Alice, as usual, was positive, and said that Miss Gresley would make you stay."

There was no further doubt as to the inmate of the post-chaise, for here was Aunt Jane, Miss Swinton, whose comings and goings were often as sudden and unexpected as now, and the girls were rather disappointed at the issue of the mystery. Miss Swinton's voice, generally pitched in a clear loud key, had reached both drawing-room and nursery, and quickly down from the one came Matty, full of reproaches and endearments, and out of the other came Mrs. Bruce, almost more uneasy at their arrival in the storm than she had been at their non-appearance with the others, for, as Miss

Swinton had said, Alice had assured them that it was almost certain that Miss Gresley would keep them at Cudthorpe.

The aspect of little Tom, with a dirty, cold face, and hat and coat covered with snow, in the arms of a strange man, was rather startling, and he had to be kissed and hugged, and found to possess all his limbs uninjured, before they were able to attend to Katharine's eager history.

"It was all Wilfrid's and Alice's fault for taking him. If Margaret and she had been alone, they would have been at home an hour ago; for, of course, the child could not be expected to walk such a distance; and then all the circumstances were gone through of their being delayed in the village, being overtaken in the storm, and, finally, the fortunate meeting with Adam Robinson. This was a signal for the latter's being brought into notice, and Adam speedily received more thanks than he considered his due, delivered in a spontaneous trio, by mamma, aunt, and nurse, in which Miss Swinton took decidedly the soprano part. The next thing was to offer hospitality to him, and he was just being passed through the green baize doors into the kitchen, to have meat and ale, when Wilfrid appeared through the same.

"Holloa, are you there," was his salutation. "Ha, ha, like a lot of Christmas-trees. Are there any goodies on you?" Here Tom eagerly produced a bullet, which was not noticed by Wilfrid, as he went on to say, "You should have come across the beck, like Alice and me. We have been at home this hour or more."

"Oh, Wilfrid," said his mother, "you surely did not bring Alice by that dangerous path?"

"Why not, mamma," answered Wilfrid, "she is as sure-footed as I am."

"That is not saying much, Wilfrid," put in his Aunt Jane, "recollect the nutting glen, last Michaelmas."

"Pretty sure that you won't forget it," said Wilfrid, half to himself; but the observation was not heard, except by Alice, who gave a little sympathetic laugh, because nurse was just now prudently suggesting that the young ladies should go and change their clothes.

"And have a cup of tea instead of dinner," added Aunt Jane. A proposal which was not well received, for Katharine looked scornful; Margaret said, "Oh, Aunt Jane, we have often been out in a storm before;" and Wilfrid fairly laughed; however, Mrs. Bruce, suddenly sensible of the necessity, begged there might be no delay in carrying out nurse's proposition, and Tommy being carried off by Matty herself, the rest of the party followed.

CHAPTER III.

Contented thence to draw
A momentary pleasure, never marked
By reason, barren of all future good.

WORDSWORTH.

MISS SWINTON was a single lady, of fortune sufficient to have enabled her to live in comfort and respectability, but not being possessed of many resources, and being withal of a very sociable disposition, she had given up the house in which for a short time she had resided alone, and spent her time in visiting about amongst her numerous relations. By these relations she was to a certain extent beloved, and rarely failed to receive from them a sincere welcome; her really estimable qualities would have made her more valued by all, had not some little peculiarities of temper, a habit of interfering, and a rather frivolous tone of mind, frequently obscured the worthiness of her character. From these causes, too, it rarely happened that she was more than a week without having some disagreement with her hostess or the servants, and although on Miss Swinton's part the ill-feeling never lasted more than a few hours, and she always awoke the next morning with a happy obliviousness of all offence; this was not always the case with the other parties, and her quarters became occasionally, as she expressed it, too hot to hold her; this did not, however, discompose Miss Swinton much, she only ordered her maid to pack the trunks, and dropped herself into the next household whose turn it was to receive her.

It was some such cause as this that had led to her sudden arrival at Eildon Manor, where she had not been expected until the spring. The length of her visit at Mr. Swinton's was always rendered uncertain by the fact of his establishment being chiefly under the control of an old and confidential housekeeper, who considered any suggestion about the dress or conduct of the maids, or advice about the making of marmalade, as a decided insult to herself, and something of this sort having been attempted by Miss Swinton, and the housekeeper's resentment having been shared in and supported by her mistress, there was nothing for it but to expedite her arrangements, to cut short the long visit she had intended to her brother, and make the best of her way to Eildon Manor. Here, in spite of the wilfulness and occasional sauciness of her nephews and nieces, and the way in which Sir Thomas Gresley, though always good-humouredly, contrived to elude her assistance in managing the Eildon matters, Miss Swinton always contrived to settle for the longest period. The very carelessness and irregularity of the household perhaps made her ways the less annoying, while in the real affection of her gentle sister, Miss Swinton had something which appealed to the best feelings of her nature, and it was at Eildon that she was always the most amiable and the least intrusive in her ways.

The snow-storm was not destined to be a short one. When the little ones arose next morning they were both excited and pleased to find a thick, white covering upon the ground, and heaps of snow in the corners of the window-panes, all caused, as Matty said, by old Mother Carey ploating her chickens in the sky. Minnie and Tom stood for a long time in the nursery window, watching the large feathery flakes chase each other through the air, a fascinating employment for any age,

and Wilfrid was full of hopes of sledging and other real winter amusements.

All this was very well for a time, but long before the end of the morning the children grew tired of watching the snow-flakes, and Wilfrid went yawning about the house in search of some employment. Finding almost every place empty and devoid of attractions, he condescended at last to visit the drawing-room, although, as he said, that would be sure to be filled with some of Aunt Jane's nonsense.

This disrespectful observation referred to Miss Swinton's fancies about work. She was for ever finding some new stitch or kind of fancy-work, perhaps hearing of it at one house, and practising it at another; or else she was busy and covering all the tables and chairs with some piece of dress-making or millinery, some Parisian mode, it might be, which she did not wish to trust to her own maid even, and in which she would afterwards have appeared quite a guy, had not the same maid, with discretion and dexterity, generally contrived to remodel or touch up the design before it was given to the world.

As Wilfrid expected, one of these grand schemes was being carried out at present; but it was not dress-making; it was a new kind of work—one that had never even been heard of in Eildon before—a work that will probably be well known to most of my readers who are old enough to remember how fashionable an employment it was for idle fingers a few years ago. Miss Swinton had just learnt the sublime art of potichomanie, and she had brought with her a large store of materials—gum, paint, pictures, implements, varnish, and glass vases, and nothing could have been more convenient than this stormy morning, for the commencement of the undertaking.

"It is quite time that you girls learned to use your fingers in some of these elegant accomplishments," said Miss Swinton, as she began to unpack her box in the drawing-room soon after breakfast. "Your cousins at Oakington have made some of the most lovely vases. No one could possibly conceive that they were made by young ladies, and in England."

Generally speaking, the girls, especially Katharine, would have been insulted by the insinuation that they could do nothing, and the comparison between them and their cousins; but they were attracted by the appearance of the work, and, somewhat affected by their aunt's enthusiasm, were almost as anxious as she was to begin. The large round table in the drawing-room was quickly cleared of all encumbrances, and at the suggestion of Matty, who happened to be in the room at the time, was covered with a clean white tablecloth, for them, as she said, to put their mess upon. Then they began their work, cutting out, varnishing, gumming, and touching up; it was delightful; even Margaret had joined them, and she was not renowned for skilful fingers. More than once they congratulated themselves upon the freedom from interruption that the storm procured for them, and they chattered, and laughed, and for some time revelled in the enjoyment that is produced by the absorbing interest of a new and pleasant occupation.

It was into the midst of all this that Wilfrid entered, ready for any mischief or amusement that might drop into his hands.

"Holloa! what are you all busy with?" he exclaimed, as soon as he saw the party. "Pasting old pictures! Why, Aunt Jane, what now?" As he spoke the young gentleman flung himself into a chair close to the table, and with the jerk blew away a whole heap of little figures

that Alice had just cut out. A chorus of reproaches burst from the whole circle. Wilfrid sheltered himself by beginning to pick up the prints, at the same time indulging in ridiculous comments upon the shepherdesses, roses, and other pastoral designs.

"My dear boy," said Miss Swinton, with whom Wilfrid, in spite of his irreverence to her, was quite a favourite, "my dear boy, I wish that you would go back to your own amusements, we are really so busy that we cannot attend to you."

"And you are only a hindrance to us," added Katharine.

"I think he might cut out for us," said Alice. "Come, Wilfrid, it is such fun."

"I can't make out what you are all doing," said Wilfrid, contemptuously.

"Potichomanie!" "A beautiful new kind of work!" "Oh, you will see when it is finished!" cried several voices at once.

"Potash what?" said Wilfrid, after pretending to stop his ears. "It looks like a kind of scrap-book for Minnie. Then this has something to do with it, has it?" As he spoke the youth lifted in his clumsy fingers the glass jar which was to receive the decorations they were preparing.

"Oh, my dear Wilfrid," screamed Aunt Jane, throwing down her scissors, and half-rising in her anxiety, "you will break the vase; it is most fragile."

"What are you going to do with it, aunt," asked Wilfrid, resigning it unwillingly.

"Don't you see, my dear?" replied Miss Swinton. "We first place the prints upon the inner surface of the vase, and we then paint the rest of the inside with this delicate pink colour. The process requires the greatest care and delicacy, but when finished, it will resemble the finest Dresden."

"Oh, I see," answered Wilfrid, with a laugh. "The effect will be very like that beautiful globe that hangs up in old Dinah Robinson's best parlour."

"Really, Wilfrid, you are too absurd," said Katharine.

"Well, now, is it not?" said Wilfrid. "I appeal to you, Alice. You know it—white, with chintz figures. We used to wonder how it was done, until one day Adam let out the secret that it was nothing but bits cut out of Dinah's old Sunday gown, stuck in, and the whole thing filled up with salt."

"This is quite different, I assure you, Wilfrid," said Miss Swinton, earnestly. "Potichomanie is entirely new. The art was taught by Lady Alicia Porter to your cousins when I was staying at Oakington."

"Who cares for Lady Alicia Porter?" said Wilfrid. "I want to know what is the use of it?"

"Wilfrid, my dear, don't be rude to your aunt," said a gentle voice from the distant sofa.

"Well, but, mamma, what can be the use of all this rubbish and litter?" persisted Wilfrid. "Why will women spend their time in doing such stuff?"

"What else could we do such a morning as this?" said Alice, in rather an extenuating voice, for she did not want to be despised by Wilfrid.

"Why do men spend their time in idling and making themselves disagreeable?" retorted Katharine.

"I wish you would go away, Wilfrid," said Margaret, speaking for the first time. "We were so nice before you came."

"I could not fancy you nice, Meg," said the incorrigible brother, going round to Margaret's side, pleased to find that he had started a new game. "But now, Meg, you can generally give a rational answer to a sensible question, so, what is the use of this work?"

"To look pretty," said Margaret, promptly.

"Very good, I am satisfied. If women look pretty, and their handiwork looks pretty, what more can we desire of them?"

"How ridiculous you are, Wilfrid," said Katharine, impatiently.

"Thanks, Kate, my friend," said Wilfrid, with a bow; then suddenly turning round, "Mamma, may I go to the theatre at Maskham next half? There is going to be a good one."

"No, my dear," replied his mother, simply.

"Why not, mamma? Lots of the boys are going. We do not think the Doctor will make any objection, if the parents give leave."

"I should like to go to a theatre of all things," said Alice. "I wish we lived nearer to Maskham. We see nothing, cooped up here."

"Oh, Alice," exclaimed Margaret, "I know when I stayed in Maskham to have my teeth done, it was far more like being cooped up. There was scarcely any sky to see, and only a house opposite, the same every day. I could scarcely breathe—only they were so kind to me."

"Meg's memorable visit to Maskham!" said Wilfrid. "Do you know, Meg, they often inquire after you, and I know that Cherry Hawkins is longing to have you there again."

Margaret looked pleased, but Miss Swinton, who had been for a few minutes absorbed in sticking the first picture on her vase, now became aware of the general inattention of her working party, and broke out into such a tirade of reproaches that Wilfrid, putting up both hands to his head to shelter himself, quitted the field so far as to walk to one of the windows, where he began listlessly to gaze upon the snow, and for some minutes stood there whistling inoffensively. But this did not last long; he soon began to wander about again,

teased the fat tabby cat until she scratched him, and then went to strum upon the piano, until Katharine reminded him that it was disagreeable to his mother.

"Wilfrid is like the idle boy in Mavor's Spelling-book," observed Margaret, "who tried in vain to get somebody to play with him. He will have to work himself at last."

"Indeed, Miss Meg!" exclaimed Wilfrid, coming up to the table again; "you'd make me a peg, that your tales upon me may be hung: I'd have you know, it is no go; so you had better just hold your tongue."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Margaret. "There, you have begun to work; you are making verses."

"Do you call those verses?" said Wilfrid, scornfully. "You little know what real work is."

"By the bye, my dear Wilfrid," said Mrs. Bruce, "have you done your holiday task yet?"

"Not I, mother," answered Wilfrid; "I have not even looked at it. I did not want to spoil the first few weeks of my holidays."

"This would be a nice day to begin upon," said his mother. "You might take your books into the dining-room, and study there; or have a fire in the school-room, if you like."

"Oh, mamma," groaned Wilfrid, shrugging his shoulders, "I did not intend to make a victim of myself, until after Miss Connor had come back. However, here goes; I will just look at it, at any rate." And so saying, Master Wilfrid left the room, and actually did get his books out, and read for about an hour; after which, feeling himself exhausted by the unusual exertion, he once more set out in search of recreation; but avoiding the drawing-room this time, he repaired to the stables, and finally to the harness-room, where the rest of the morning was wiled away.

Meanwhile, the ladies had returned with renewed zest to their occupation. Aunt Jane, who was very generous about such matters, presented each of them with a small cup to practise on for themselves ; and this giving them new interest in their work, the whole morning passed away, and the dinner-bell sounded, before they felt inclined to move. And so great was their enthusiasm, that of Kathariné especially, that no sooner was the ceremony of dinner—voted a great plague—at an end, than they returned to their round table. In vain Minnie claimed attention—in vain did Snap look out for his accustomed caresses ; no time could be spared for them—potiche alone was worth attending to ; and when twilight came, it was most unwelcome. The long chat by the fireside, that Aunt Jane generally loved at this hour, would have been insupportable to-day ; for did not her vase want but a few inches of painting to complete it, and then the full effect of the accomplishment would be shown ?

At first, they tried to continue by the light of a wax candle, placed in the middle of the table ; but that made Mrs. Bruce nervous : a single spark dropping upon the papers might have such disastrous consequences ; so the lamp was ordered in, and then they went on briskly, until at last Aunt Jane's vase was finished. Loud was the admiration, warm enough to satisfy even the artiste herself. Wilfrid even allowed that Margaret was right in saying that it would look pretty. Matty had to be brought down to look at it ; and when it was placed, in solemn state, upon the chiffonier, with the mirror behind it, which made two vases, instead of one, as Minnie, clapping her hands, declared, it seemed as if Palissy, when at last he found his porcelain in an enamelled state, could not have been much happier than Miss Swinton at this moment felt.

It would have been well if this contentment had been more enduring. But now, after her hard day's work was over, and her vase successfully finished, Miss Swinton's interest in potichomanie was much abated, whilst that of her nieces was as yet undiminished, and much disagreement was the consequence. Miss Swinton began to criticise, find fault, and hurry them ; until, at last, when she gave a strong hint that it was a very bad thing to remain so long stooping over one employment, Katharine threw down her brush in a pet, and all happy working was at an end. As often happened in this household, what began in ardent pleasure, being in itself selfish and uncontrolled, ended in a sort of little bickering, which left a disagreeable impression of the whole affair.

It is probable that, whether pleasantly or not, most of the party dreamt of potichomanie that night ; at any rate, Margaret did ; for, as she dressed the next morning, in the little room that she occupied next to her mother's, she was narrating, in a lively manner, through the open door of communication between the rooms, the extraordinary parts that the various Chinese figures had played during the night. And, whether she had dreamt of it or not, it is true that Miss Swinton paid a visit to her vase the first thing before breakfast ; for Alice, who was mighty inquisitive, as Matty said, and liked to know everybody's business, seeing the drawing-room open, as she came downstairs, peeped in, and found Aunt Jane with the vase in her hands, gazing upon it with happy admiration. A feeling of being caught, and perhaps some fear of Alice's well-known powers of quizzing, made Miss Swinton set the vase down with a suddenness that caused it to resound upon the marble table ; but, thrilling with anxiety as she was, Miss Swinton scarcely dared to give a glance back to

assure herself of the safety of her treasure, but, addressing some trivial remark to Alice, led the way into another room.

The sight of her vase, however, renewed all Miss Swinton's energy in the cause, and she beat up her recruits as soon as ever breakfast was over. Katharine had recovered her good-humour, and was quite ready. Alice said she would come for a little while, but she expected that Wilfrid would want her soon. Margaret it was no use asking, they knew, for besides that she had the robins to feed, no potichomanie would have made her forego the privilege of going round as she did every morning with her mother to visit the nursery and kitchens, and give orders before settling to her sofa for the rest of the day. It would have been as odd to see "Missus" without her shawl as without "Miss Marget" by her side, and no one thought of wishing her away, although nothing escaped her deep long-sighted eye, and quick ear, and she often touched her mamma's arm, and said, "Mamma, you've forgotten so and so," when it might be some fault she had to notice, as well as some kind deed to remember.

This morning, Mrs. Bruce and Miss Margaret had to listen to a long dismal story from the cook, about Burton, one of the small farmers near, whose wife was sister to the gardener. It seemed that some sheep of Burton's had been out in the snow, and the poor man had gone last night to look for them, and had never come back again, and his wife's anxiety, as cook described it, was quite pitiful.

"May I go and see her, mamma?" asked Margaret at once, but the blocked-up paths, and the still falling snow, made Mrs. Bruce's refusal more reasonable than Margaret's request, and after leaving directions for Adams to go and offer any assistance that might be

needed, they both went back to the drawing-room. Then Margaret resumed her potichomanie, but every now and then she left her cutting-out to go to the window and wonder if poor Burton had got home.

"It is a common thing, I dare say," said Miss Swinton, "for the farmers to be benighted when they are looking for their sheep. You had better not distress yourself."

"But Mary is such a weak woman," said Margaret, coming back reluctantly. "She will be ill with fretting."

"How do you know that, Meg," asked Alice, looking up.

"Oh, Margaret is on visiting terms with the whole Dale, I think," said Katharine, carelessly, as she held up her cup to the light to observe the effect of her last touches.

"I know that when little Willie fell into the Beck before her eyes, she fainted away instead of going to pick him out," said Margaret, in reply to Alice's question, "and Miss Connor said that it was a great pity that she was so weak."

Wilfrid came into the room as Margaret was speaking, and he wished to know who was the subject of Miss Connor's pity, and from this, hearing the story, he left the room to gain further particulars, and the work went on again for some time without interruptions.

But about noon the post arrived, and that was always an important event at Eildon, where it only happened three times a week. This morning it was later than usual, owing to the heavy roads, and the immense drifts through which the letter-carrier had to make his way. No doubt, however, he had been cheered along his toilsome path by the thought of the hospitality of the Manor House, where he knew that he should be warmed and refreshed before he was allowed to proceed up the

Dale with the few letters he had yet to deliver. When Miss Swinton was at Eildon, the postman's bag was always heavier, for rarely did he come without more than one dispatch for her, and this morning was no exception to the rule, for there were in fact three for her, including amongst the number, one from her friend, Lady Alicia Porter.

All were, however, laid aside to join in the general pleasure that was given by the sight of a blue, thin envelope, the unfailing sign of news from Walter. Mrs. Bruce knowing the important point upon which her last letter had been designed to probe her son, was much unnerved by the sight of the reply, and Miss Swinton becoming more than usually excited, the curiosity of the girls was greatly raised.

"Walter writes still from Rome," was all the reply Mrs. Bruce gave to Katharine's eager questions, "and I have not yet come to any messages for you," and then she gave a significant glance to her sister, which caused that lady at once vigorously to endeavour to divert the attention of her nieces by reading to them portions of Lady Alicia's letter, which, unfortunately, was only a string of unmeaning phrases, and contained no point of interest, except the account of a new colour for potichomanie, a delicate light green, which made an exquisite ground-work, and was scarcely known to any one yet, but Lady Alicia and a few chosen friends.

"When I passed through Maskham," said Miss Swinton, as she folded up the note, "I spoke to Mr. Tomkins about the new work, and advised him to lay in a good stock of the materials. The next time you go to your dancing lesson you can inquire if he has this green, but I much suspect that it is improbable. Good news I hope, Ellen," she added, turning to her sister, but that lady, with difficulty controlling her emotion,

was just then gathering up her shawl, and the next minute left the room. She was immediately followed by Miss Swinton, who motioned with her hand mysteriously for her nieces to remain where they were, and said, "It is nothing, my dears, I assure you ; your poor mother's nerves are easily upset ; *I* will go to her."

"That is always the way with Aunt Jane," said Katharine, who had started up. "Why might not I go too, I wonder? I think I ought to know if there is anything the matter with Walter."

"Is he ill, do you think, Katharine," asked Margaret, anxiously.

"No, I fancy not," answered Katharine. "I think mamma did not look so much distressed as all—all in a state. I declare I will go."

"No, Kate, don't," said Margaret.

"Why not?" asked Kate sharply.

"It would not be right, when mamma went away by herself."

"Now, that is always the way with Margaret," put in Alice ; "it is as bad as having Miss Connor always at one's elbow, and worse, because she soon gives up, but Margaret keeps on without budging an inch. I say, Meg, you are so fond of teaching, you should go and take Dame Kelly's place ; they say they don't know who to get to mind the bairns now the dame is dead."

"I should like it, if I could," said Margaret gravely.

"Oh, you little simpleton," said Katharine, laughing, "I believe that you and Elinor Gresley talk yourselves into the belief that you are too good for this world, instead of being a couple of ninnies, as you are."

"I tell you what," said Alice, breaking in with a new thought, "I'm sick of potichomanie, and I think it is just rubbish. There now. I have lifted up my testimony against it, and I will give my cup to anyone who will

finish it : ” and as she spoke she raised the glass up for inspection.

It had not made much progress ; there were two or three pictures gummed on crooked, and the whole thing soiled, though not more so than Alice’s fingers, which seemed to have collected a little bit from all the different materials upon the table.

“ I will,” said Margaret, promptly accepting the offer, “ and I know what I will do with it.”

“ Here goes, then,” said Alice, with her usual elegance of expression, handing the cup over to Margaret ; but doing it clumsily, as usual, the frail vessel slipped from her fingers, and fell in pieces upon the table.

“ Oh, Alice,” exclaimed Margaret, reproachfully ; “ and I wanted to finish it for a present to Miss Connor. She would have been so surprised.”

“ Well, remember it was my cup,” said Alice, rather crossly, “ you had not got possession of it. There now, I have cut my fingers with the nasty thing. I hate Aunt Jane’s new pieces of work, there is sure to be mischief out of them. However, I’m sorry the cup is broken, Margaret,” she added more graciously, “ as you really wanted it.”

“ Never mind, Alice,” said Margaret, consolingly, “ perhaps I should not have done it fit to be seen. Oh ! Katharine has gone.”

“ Hurrah,” cried Alice, “ she and Aunt Jane are sure to have a skirmish about Walter’s letter. I’ll go and see the fun ; ” so saying, she too went out of the room, leaving Margaret to bemoan the downfall of her little plan and the tiresome conduct in general of both her sisters—a topic that her thoughts dwelt upon much more often than was conducive to a loving and forbearing feeling for them.

CHAPTER IV.

Listening for the murmured blessing
Sorrow always brings.—A. A. PROCTER.

IF Alice really followed her aunt and sister for the purpose of having fun out of them, she must have been disappointed, because when she arrived upstairs, all was over, and she met Katharine, in high spirits, but full of importance, walking with dignity along the gallery.

"Ha, ha! they have not let you in," said Alice, mockingly.

"Indeed you are mistaken," said Katharine, stopping to meet her Aunt Jane, who was just turning out of her own room.

Alice now tried her ingenuity upon both of them to discover what had taken place, but completely without result, her attempts were too obvious and easily baffled; so at last she went to her mother, but there again was foiled, for she was only assured that Walter was well, and that she need not be uneasy about him in any way. So at last she was reduced to going into the nursery, where she could grumble to her heart's content, being pretty sure of a good listener in Matty.

The fact was, that Walter had written a most affectionate letter to his mother, candidly declaring that, as she had anticipated, his affections were fixed upon General Du Port's daughter. He described the young lady in the glowing language of tenderness. She was motherless, with few near relations, but devoted to her father, and possessed of many qualities which he felt

sure would quickly lead Mrs. Bruce to look upon her as a beloved daughter, could he only be successful in his suit. But for this he waited for his mother's approval, which he entreated her to give him quickly, as he should wait for it with the utmost impatience. Other particulars were added, and then Walter said that in case of his marriage, he had determined to occupy a sort of shooting-box that belonged to him, called Eildon Lodge, situated in a more bleak but very picturesque part of the Dale, higher up than the Manor. The place could be easily made comfortable, he said; and he begged his mother not to raise any objections to this plan, upon which he had set his heart. Mrs. Bruce was much touched by such a proof of the tender and delicate consideration of her son, which would not allow him to bring anyone to dispute the possession of the Manor-house with her; but although her property was ample, the house was Walter's, and she resolved that no feeling of regard for her old home should make her accept this sacrifice on the part of her son. No, Walter must be his father's representative, his wife should be mistress of her rightful home, and in spite of all Miss Swinton's representations (for she, as soon as she found what her sister's intentions were, opposed them with all her might), Mrs. Bruce determined to lose no time in sending her son a blessing upon his choice, and assuring him that it must be the Manor-house for him, whilst she and her family would move to Maskham, where, with some evident drawback, there would be advantages in the education of the children, which would amply justify her proposal.

With the former part of these affairs alone was Katharine made acquainted, when, being, as Miss Swinton remarked, of an age to know a little of the family affairs, she was admitted to her mother's room, and

as she was ignorant that any circumstances were kept from her, she was contented, and sufficiently excited by the grand piece of news that had been entrusted to her.

There was no returning to potichomanie work this morning. Margaret as usual, being left alone, had betaken herself to reading ; Alice, tired of the nursery, had wandered over the house from attics to harness-room in a vain search for Wilfrid ; and at last, in his room, had tumbled upon a fishing-book, and, albeit the halcyon days were yet far off, she began to make preparations for them, by endeavouring to concoct a fly. Katharine meanwhile was endeavouring to occupy her excited restlessness in a consultation with her aunt's maid about a new trimming for her bonnet, and the searchings for materials that it produced filled up the rest of her morning. As to Miss Swinton, she had more letters than ever to write, including one to Lady Alicia Porter, containing the intelligence, that she felt herself obliged, in strict confidence, to communicate to each of her correspondents, that her eldest nephew, Walter Bruce, of Eildon, was about to form a matrimonial engagement with a lady of family, fortune, and great personal attractions, whose name for the present she must in prudence withhold, &c. &c. And thus it happened that everybody being so completely engrossed by their own concerns, or by the chief incident of the day, it was never found out until they all met at dinner that Wilfrid was absent ; and as one of the few points upon which Mrs. Bruce was really particular with her children was punctuality at dinner, Wilfrid's non-appearance made her very uneasy, especially as the weather was not such as to make an outdoor excursion tempting. No one in the house seemed to know anything about the absentee, and dinner was proceeding in rather an uncomfortable way, when all at once Alice

startled everybody by exclaiming, "I guess where Wilfrid is. He will have gone out to look for Burton ; I wish I was with him."

This bright suggestion of her daughter's, whilst it threw Mrs. Bruce into a great state of nervousness, was allowed by every one to be a very probable one ; Miss Swinton declaring that Wilfrid was quite foolish enough to have done such a thing ; and Katharine as quickly taking up the gauntlet, and maintaining that it would be both brave and noble of him if he had gone. However, Margaret's proposal of going herself in waterproof shoes to Burton's cottage to inquire, being negatived, and a messenger sent to the gardener's instead, they were obliged to wait some minutes in suspense, until the man returned with information that confirmed their fears. Mr. Wilfrid, it was said, with two men had, in fact, gone out in search of William Burton, and his poor anxious wife had been much comforted by Mr. Wilfrid's kindness ; but now four or five hours having elapsed since they first set off, she also had become uneasy for their safety.

It may be supposed that this news did not calm Mrs. Bruce's anxiety. Her nervous tremor increased so much that Miss Swinton became quite impatient with her, as she generally did when her sister showed any weakness of this description, and this, so far from quieting the disturbance, threw Mrs. Bruce still further into hysterics, and Matty was summoned to her assistance, when, by the glance she darted at Miss Swinton, it might be seen that she guessed who had helped on the mischief. But Margaret was now the one to take the lead ; her mother's smelling-bottle and sal-volatile were at hand directly ; she led the children into Susan's care, and when Mrs. Bruce had become a little better, she adroitly suggested that aunt Jane might send some

people out to look for Wilfrid; and this answered two purposes, for Miss Swinton, catching at the thought, went away directly to give orders accordingly, and Mrs. Bruce, besides being relieved by her absence, was somewhat comforted when she recovered, to find that some steps had been taken without loss of further time. And soon she was able to be assisted to her usual corner of the drawing-room, where Margaret sat beside her, holding her hand, and sometimes uttering low words of tenderness, which no one but her mother ever heard from her.

Poor Alice, once alarmed, was in a dreadful state. After wandering about the house in tears, she at last took her stand before a high staircase window, which at other times commanded some miles of country, but from which at present nothing could be seen but the snow falling in a ceaseless succession of large flakes, and a dim prospect through the veil they formed, of snow, ceaseless snow, from this window. However, she could not be moved. All the men in and about the house had already gone out to search in one direction, and having returned without success, immediately set out in another, leaving the rest of the household in a state of extreme anxiety as to the result of their young master's benevolent temerity. The twilight had begun to creep on, and with it a greater depression over all the watchers, when all at once a noise was heard in the courtyard, and a loud talking in the kitchen. Alice, with a great scream, had flown downstairs, and when all the rest hastened through the green door, they met her hurrying back, choking with the glad words, "Wilfrid is all right, and he has found Burton."

Mrs. Bruce's thankfulness was too much for words, she sank upon a chair that Katharine placed for her, and sat in silence with Margaret still close beside her, whilst the others expressed in different ways their relief

and joy. Fifty questions were upon Miss Swinton's tongue, and it was from amongst the confusion of answers she received, that the others were able to glean the particulars. Wilfrid and his party had found Burton up to his chin in a snowdrift, and quite unable to help himself; when they got him out, he was "well-nigh spent," and they had to carry him home on their shoulders. He was very ill when they got him home, and Robinson had gone down to Sonnysides for the doctor. But where was Wilfrid? Nobody seemed to know. The men had missed him just after they came out of Burton's cottage; they believed that there was some accident on the Maskham-road, and he had gone to see about it. They thought that they had better come on and tell the news.

"Quite right of you," said Miss Swinton; "Master Wilfrid is far too venturesome."

"Blessings on him," was the murmured reply of half the party, the rightful denizens of the kitchen, with whom Master Wilfrid was always a favourite, and not less so now when he had risked his life to save that of one of their friends; and Miss Swinton's objurgations on her nephew's rashness met with no response from them.

Mrs. Bruce meanwhile had caught the sound of an accident, and hastily rising up, had gone amongst them to inquire the particulars; but no one being able to afford them, she desired the gardener, who had just come into the kitchen, to go and beg Mr. Wilfrid to return directly, and then, after giving some directions to the cook about providing food and other comforts for the weather-beaten men, who were now shaking the melting snow from off their persons in the outer porch, Mrs. Bruce, desiring her daughters to follow her, left the kitchen.

They had scarcely passed the green-baize door that

admitted them into the passage leading to the hall, when the front door was flung open with a noisy energy that left no doubt about who was coming in, and the next moment Wilfrid appeared, enveloped in a covering of snow, which he vainly tried to shake and stamp off as he stood upon the mat. His face was bright with exercise, and ruddy with long exposure to the frosty air, and the expression of his countenance was earnest and pre-occupied, as, scarcely heeding the expressions of fondness, the inquiries and reproaches that assailed and welcomed him on all sides, he hastened up to his mother, and said quickly, "Mamma, the Hawkins's have been over-turned, and Cherry is much hurt. What shall we do? Can't we have her here? I ran up to ask you."

"The Hawkins's! my dear," echoed his mother, in surprise.

"Yes. Frank has been taken very ill, and they were sent for. Cherry begged to come with them, and they had nearly got as far as our lodge-gates, when the chaise fell into a drift, and they missed the road, and were tumbled over into Simpson's pasture. There is no one hurt but Cherry."

"Oh! mamma," cried Margaret, "pray let me go to her; the snow is nothing."

"Only a foot deep on the carriage-road," said Wilfrid, drily.

"Matty shall go," said Mrs. Bruce, "and Adams; and they must all come here, of course."

"I scarcely think they will, mamma," said Wilfrid; "except Cherry—she must; but their first thought was for a fresh pair of horses to carry them on. Poor Frank he must be very bad. However, I will go and ask them."

Without another word, the ardent boy rushed off; and then Margaret ran to call Matty, and after rapidly

making her understand the strange events that were occurring, she tore down from its hook a great carriage cloak of her mother's, and in another minute was on her knees in the lumber closet, looking for a pair of large snow boots that she was sure she had seen there. The good old nurse did not need urging when there was any real kindness to be done, and almost before the party downstairs had recovered from their amazement, she appeared before them in costume fitted for the weather, with Minnie, half frightened, in her arms, and Tommy running after her.

"Here, Miss Katharine, my dear," said she, going up to Miss Bruce first, "just mind the bairns a bit for me, will you, for Susan's gone daft wi' all this, and it's no use leaving them wi' her. And now, ma'am," turning to her mistress, "what is it, please? for Miss Margaret hurried me so that I feel quite dazed, and I's sure I hardly know what it is I'm wanted for, only she made me throw this cloak over me which I hope you will excuse the liberty."

A few words made Matty acquainted with all they knew themselves; and Adams, the old man-servant, appearing at the same time, they hastened away together, with orders to offer every assistance and hospitality to the unfortunate travellers.

Wilfrid had not exaggerated the depth of the snow. It was with great difficulty, and only by the help of her friend Adams, that Matty could make her way through it, for in some places every step plunged her up to the knee. The woman at the lodge came to the door to exchange a greeting with her, and wonder at her being so venturesome; but round the corner, out of the shelter of the plantations, it was worse. Although the road was partially cleared, gusts of wind drove the falling snow into her face, and she was glad

to draw the hood closely over her head, and cling to Adams as her guide.

A little further along the road, they came upon the scene of disaster. A small crowd surrounded the spot, for all the men and boys at the cottages within hailing distance had hastened to the field into which the carriage had been overturned. Several of these had been occupied in cutting the traces and raising the fallen horses ; this had been accomplished, and now the chaise itself, by the united force of several pairs of sturdy arms, was raised from the bank of snow against which it had fallen, and pushed a few yards further to a level place, where it could stand upright.

Watching the operations of the men, and occasionally casting anxious glances in the direction of the village, from which fresh horses and the doctor were expected to arrive, stood the poor father, Mr. Hawkins, his pale face and compressed lips the only tokens of the agonizing suspense he was enduring. His wife was in the carriage, almost forgetting her dreadful anxiety about the one child in her sympathy with the other, Cherry, who lay in her mother's arms, unable to suppress the groans her sufferings called forth. In the midst of the men was Wilfrid, actively helping first one and then the other, and infusing spirit and energy into all.

Matty went straight up to the carriage, and her heart ached pitifully as she saw the snow driving in upon the suffering girl through the broken windows on both sides. She was personally known to both Mrs. Hawkins and her daughter, as she was to every one who knew the Bruces, and her voice was most welcome to them as its homely tones delivered her mistress's message.

"Thanks, dear nurse," said Mrs. Hawkins, pressing Matty's hand, as she perceived the real sympathy in the kind creature's face ; "we can decide upon nothing

until the doctor comes. Miss Cherry wishes very much to go on, but if she should not be able to do so, then—”

Her voice failed her here. Poor mother! with her heart divided between her two suffering children, and Cherry beginning with an “Oh, mamma,” ended by raising her head to meet her mother’s lips in a silent kiss.

Another person now appeared upon the scene, and quickly came up to the carriage with Wilfrid and Mr. Hawkins. This was the doctor—Doctor Todd, as he was generally called, a rough but clever man, who divided his time between riding to see his numerous patients, who were scattered over miles of hill and dale, and in sitting in the bars of all the public-houses between this and Maskham, where his ready wit and easy manner made him popular with all classes of customers. It was said that his intemperate habits alone had prevented Mr. Todd from rising to the head of his profession. In this district, where, alas! one who would not drink freely was only considered half a man, this propensity did not diminish his reputation amongst the majority of the Dalespeople; and although now and then a rumour of the sad consequences of his attending a patient whilst in a state of positive inebriety, or of his delay in answering a summons, from the same disgraceful cause, was heard, still people had confidence in him; and it was only some more sober-judging ones who would talk of the time when that very steady young man, John Walker’s son, should come down from London, where he was learning his profession, and settle at Sonnysides as a rival to Mr. Todd.

Such was the man for whom Matty respectfully made way, and who very quickly, and after a short examination, made up his opinion about the case.

“She must not remain here a moment longer. To the Manor? Of course; every comfort there. Get a

shutter, man. A mattress laid upon it—do very well. Large umbrella held over her, six men, and have her up to Eildon in no time. You, Adams, go and tell them to get ready for us. The library the best place ; iron bedstead out of the nursery ; stands opposite to the window. Ha ! ha ! Mrs. Martha, that is your domain. By the bye, is Miss Swinton there ? She must be kept out of the way. Talk—put the young lady into a fever in ten minutes.”

All this, jerked out at intervals in a broad, Yorkshire accent, with his head on one side, and looking first at one and then at another of his auditors with a sharp, knowing glance, showed that Mr. Todd had begun to enjoy his case, “a complicated one ;” his decided manner gave confidence to all, and, as usual, the arrival of the Doctor proved a sensible relief.

In a wonderfully short space of time, all that he had ordered was at the side of the carriage, and then with much skill Mr. Todd superintended the moving of the young girl to the mattress, and contrived that it should be as little painful as possible ; a large cotton umbrella was raised over her, and the procession moved by slow and regular steps towards the manor-house. The father would have taken his share of the precious burden, but he was at once pushed aside by the active little doctor, who said, “Bring her,” pointing to Mrs. Hawkins, and then himself took the place at the head of the young lady, from which position he directed the movements of the other men with care and despotic promptitude. Close behind followed Mr. Hawkins, tenderly bearing up the steps of his afflicted wife, and thus they proceeded to Eildon.

Wilfrid had only waited to see that all the doctor's injunctions were quickly attended to, and then he rushed up to the house to see that everything there was being

prepared. And eagerly did the whole establishment hasten to perform his bidding. The bedstead, Matty's own, was brought into the library, the fire made to blaze out cheerfully, and everything arranged as comfortably as possible. Mistress, maids, daughters, all were attending with alacrity. Mrs. Bruce, having forgotten her own palpitations for the time, in her zealous desire to help an afflicted neighbour, was, although unable to move about much herself, giving those directions which can come from none so well as an experienced mistress, and the rest were obeying her. Miss Swinton, too, for once acting more than talking, helped vigorously ; selfishness and indifference were laid aside, and all, stirred by the pure sentiment of benevolence, earnestly joined together in the work.

When the mournful procession reached the door, there might have been a general rush to meet it, had not Mr. Todd, always on the watch, entered first, and in a few strong words announced, that none but Mrs. Bruce and one daughter must remain in sight—that the hall must be cleared before he should allow his patient to be brought in.

"You are surely not aware, Mr. Todd," said Miss Swinton, "of the delicate state my sister is in. Her nerves have already been tried to-day. I must now take her place."

"Your place is here, madam," said Mr. Todd, opening the drawing-room door, with a resolute air, that made Miss Swinton, only for the purpose, as she afterwards said, of escaping from the detestable man, at once pass him with a quick step, and go into the drawing-room.

As Miss Swinton was the only one against whom Mr. Todd's strictures were really aimed, he now contented himself with waving his hand to the others as a signal that they were to disappear, and then went to the door

to meet the men who were just entering with their burden. A few words in passing had explained to Mrs. Bruce that she need not be afraid of seeing anything very horrible, and with the kindness which scarcely any but a mother who has suffered could feel, she went to meet them, and with gentle sympathy made them understand how glad she was to be able to minister to them.

The cheerful warm library was like a haven to the distressed parents and their injured daughter, and Cherry was soon laid upon the bed prepared for her. Then Mrs. Bruce and Katharine, who had remained with her, were advised to leave the room until the necessary but painful operation of setting the fractured limb was gone through, and only the parents and Matty remained. The dreadful business had been just concluded, when the carriage, hastily repaired, and supplied with fresh horses, was drawn up to the door, and served to remind Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins of what they might otherwise have for the time forgotten, that they were, perhaps, still more greatly needed in another place. What was to be done? Mrs. Bruce was summoned, and without a moment's hesitation she advised them to go forward, assuring them that Cherry should be nursed with the greatest care. Confiding as they did in her tender kindness, and longing to be with their son, Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins, with gratitude but half expressed, upon this determined to proceed, and agonizing as the very thought of it was to Cherry, she submitted to the necessity in the most complete manner. When she heard that her mother must leave her, a shudder passed through her frame, and the large tears gathered in her eyes, but her head was turned that they might be concealed, and when the father and mother came to the bedside to bid their heroic child "Good-bye," she even tried to smile.

The smile went to her mother's heart, and she exclaimed, "I will not leave you, my Cherry!" but then the poor girl took upon herself the office of encouragement, and she said, "Oh, yes, mamma, Frank wants you much more than I do. I shall be very nice here, only"—and a rising sob half choked the whispered words—"give my love to him."

Then they left her, and, surrounded by all the wraps and comforts that kindness could suggest for them, they set out afresh on their miserable journey.

Cherry Hawkins was only fourteen years of age, but from being an only daughter, she had been made the companion of her mother, and in many respects she had become old beyond her years, whilst in others she possessed a wonderful simplicity. The love she bore for her mother was only equalled by her affection for her only brother, and on hearing of the sudden and dangerous illness with which Frank had been seized, whilst on a visit to his grandmother, a lady who was advanced in years and totally blind, she had so longed to go with her parents to help to nurse him, that they indulged her wish, anticipating no further difficulty from the storm than a retarding of their impatient movements, until the accident which had ended so sadly for their poor daughter. As they learned from Mr. Todd before they left her, the consequences were likely to be more tedious than dangerous; but there was enough to try Cherry's patience in the prospect of a long confinement, and the separation from those she loved best in the world.

Happily Cherry had been trained in a school of unselfishness. Aware of the dangers that beset an only daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins had sought to nourish in her the only safeguard against all evil, the sound principles of religion brought into daily practice. And

their efforts seemed to have been blessed of Heaven, for scarcely could you find a more humble-minded, cheerful, and unselfish girl than Cherry Hawkins, and though of course not free from faults, she was a companion any mother might have been glad of for her daughters.

The way in which Margaret Bruce and Cherry had become intimate has been already hinted at, in the allusion to a visit Margaret had once paid of a whole fortnight, proposed and accepted chiefly that Margaret might have the advantage of the attendance of a dentist at a time when her teeth needed it. In this fortnight they became fast friends, the liking on Cherry's part increased by a feeling of reverence for Margaret, not because of the slight difference in their ages, but because, as Cherry told her mother, Margaret was so clever. Mrs. Hawkins was rather surprised at Cherry's finding this out, for Margaret possessed so few accomplishments; she was not skilful either with her needle, or with pencil—not to be compared with the handy Cherry in these respects; though extremely fond of music, she was too fastidious to be showy in her own performance, and during this visit amongst strangers was very silent, but Cherry explained herself further by saying, "And Margaret wishes more than anything to be very good; she says that she would not care if she were blind, or lame, or anything, if she could be wonderfully good, and she says things sometimes like papa, which I cannot quite understand, at least which I could not tell you again, mamma, though I half know what she means."

But that was two years ago, and since then the friendship had subsisted upon very little intercourse; a short visit occasionally with their governess, when the Bruces went to take dancing lessons in Maskham, and once or twice when Wilfrid went back to school, and

Margaret had been allowed to go in the carriage with him, for the express purpose of seeing her friend, but that was all ; and now the first gleam of brightness which Cherry found when she tried to look at the pleasanter side of things, was the thought that she was under the same roof at last as her friend Margaret. "If you please, Mrs. Bruce, when may I see Margaret?" was the first question she asked when left alone with the gentle lady who had taken her mother's place beside her bed, and was endeavouring by soothing cares to prevent Cherry from feeling too acutely that fond mother's absence.

"Soon, I hope, my dear," was the answer, "but to-day Mr. Todd wishes you to be so very quiet that he will let no one come into the room but myself and Matty."

"It will be something pleasant to look forward to," said Cherry, looking up at Mrs. Bruce with a grateful smile.

It would have been as well if all had submitted as sweetly to Mr. Todd's directions as Cherry had done, but Margaret, as soon as ever she saw her mother, was urgent in her entreaties that she might be allowed to nurse Cherry, or at least, to sit with her a little while, and she was supported by Katharine, who pronounced Mr. Todd an old humbug, and by Miss Swinton, who said with warmth, that he was a low fellow, who kept up his influence solely by bullying people, and that she should strongly advise Mrs. Bruce to send for Dr. Ferguson from Maskham. Mrs. Bruce, however, stood firm against them all, declared that Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins being satisfied with Mr. Todd, was quite enough, and after some more words upon the subject, the rebellious ones were obliged to give way, and for this evening Cherry's sick-room was inviolate.

CHAPTER V.

Fancy gives me back my wife;
And Fancy gives me back my child;
She gives me back my little home,
And all its placid joys.

KIRKE WHITE.

It would seem as if in the new excitement of the Hawkins' accident, Wilfrid and his adventures had been forgotten ; but if this had been the case for a while, their interest was all revived by the time that they were all summoned to the substantial tea that had been provided with regard to the adventurer, and Wilfrid, attended by his faithful Alice, who had kept guard upon him ever since he came in, that he might not slip off on any more knight-errantry without her knowledge, when he came into the room was welcomed as if he had only now made his first appearance. He was overpowered by caresses and attentions, and assailed by so many questions, that at last, laying down his knife and fork, he declared that he would just tell them once for all how it had all happened, and then never another word about it. It may be believed that he did not get through his story without many a question and interruption ; however, he did finish it, and the main facts were these :—

After leaving the house, he had gone first, without any definite plan, to Mrs. Burton's cottage, to hear the true story of the missing shepherd. He found Burton's loss only too true ; the poor wife was rocking herself to and fro in the chimney corner, finding vent for her misery in a low monotonous groaning. Her sister-in-law

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was taking care of the children, and every now and then, as she moved about the place, was throwing out little bits of comfort, such as, "Take heart, honey, there's mony a ane been out far longer, and has come back again. He's mebbe gone after a missing sheep. Ye ken he's just t'man to leave all t'rest, and gang on after ane. I'se warrant he's ta'en shelter in ane o' t'huts aboun t'hills. Niver fret, honey," &c., but all in vain, and not a sound except the groaning had they got from her for hours. As soon, however, as Wilfrid entered the cottage, she started up and said, "Oh, Master Wilfrid, will ye no gang and seek my William? he's fallen asleep on the cold snow, and I'se never see him mair. I'd ha' gone to fint him mysel, but Alice winna let me gang, and his children may be fatherless t'morn."

"I will go, Mary," said Wilfrid, "but tell me first, which way was William aiming for when he first left the house?"

Animated by the hope that Wilfrid's quiet cheerful bearing gave her, the poor woman told him the tracks that her husband was likely to follow, and Alice helped her out with some particulars, and thus provided with the necessary intelligence, he next went to the lodge to secure the aid of the keeper's son, a young man whose daring nature had made him a great favourite with Wilfrid, and who had often been his companion in his most hardy exploits. On hearing the nature and object of the expedition, old Pearson, the keeper, himself offered, indeed insisted upon joining them, and after being provided with great coats, spiked sticks, and other articles that Pearson's experience told them they might have need of, the trio set off.

It is unnecessary to follow them through every turn of their severe and toilsome search. None but a born

Dalesman could have braved the severity of the storm. When they got upon the highest ground, the wind came in gusts, and drove the snow so sharply against their faces, that they were almost blinded by it ; and sometimes the track was blocked up entirely by a heavy drift, in which ten shepherds might have been entombed, and then Pearson's sagacity was taxed to the uttermost, as he steered them round it to the path again. At short intervals, too, they paused and gave vent to loud shouts, halloos, and whistling, but as yet without the least response, until at length, dispirited and fatigued, Wilfrid's steps began to flag ; but on this being perceived by the old man, and a proposal to return home being made, Wilfrid roused himself up, and declared that he for one should not think of going back again until they had explored the Brown Scaur, the last point to which Mary Burton had thought it likely that the sheep would stray. The others would not be outdone by the young gentleman, so on they plodded again ; but it is perhaps doubtful whether their strength would have lasted out much longer had they not opportunely arrived at a place of shelter. This was Ben Hildreth's, a desolate farm-house, so far removed from all frequent intercourse with the rest of the world, at least in winter, that it was often thrown upon its own resources for weeks together, and used to be victualled at the commencement of the season, like a ship going out to the Polar regions. Few people could have lived in so desolate a situation, but Ben and his maiden sister, who had been born and brought up on the Brown Scaur, after the retired and saving fashion of their forefathers, and who would have been like fish out of water in a more frequented neighbourhood, were happy and quite satisfied.

Ben and Dinah Hildreth were, as we have said, saving

in their habits, but even above saving is hospitality amongst the Dalesmen, and the snow-blocked door was speedily thrown open to Wilfrid and his friends. The best of their frugal fare was quickly spread before the wearied men, and whilst the greatest sympathy, expressed in hard cold tones, was felt for the object of their search, it was not until they had been dried, warmed, and fed, that they were allowed to go forth into the storm again. It was with new vigour that they went out now, and traversed the rest of the Scaur, but still to no purpose, and they were obliged, disappointed, to turn their steps homeward. Not, however, by the same route as that by which they had come; a new one, though a little longer, gave them a chance still of finding the poor shepherd.

Mile after mile, however, was again toiled over, with the same want of success, until at last they reached a point, from whence, in fine weather, Eildon Manor and its immediate neighbourhood could be completely overlooked. Pearson was remarking upon this, and the different scene that now presented itself, in the sheets of falling snow close to their eyes, and the same white monotony all round them, when Wilfrid's attention was caught by a curious wailing sound in the distance. Without a moment's hesitation he raised a loud view-halloo.

"What's in t'wind now, Mr. Wilfrid?" said old Pearson, standing still.

"Listen, and you'll hear," answered Wilfrid, raising his hand to his ear.

They all paused, and now distinctly came upon the air the howling of a dog.

"We are coming, old boy," shouted Wilfrid, whilst Pearson pointed out the direction of the sound. "If it is not Burton," he added, as they turned, "it may be

some poor wretch in need of us, so let us lose no time."

The others were not behindhand in alacrity, and, guided by the cries of the animal, they soon reached the spot from which the sounds proceeded. They had to go quite close before they could perceive the creature, who was mounting guard beside a small dark object which just appeared above the snow. They had no sooner approached than they were startled by hearing a faint sound come from this object. It was only however for a moment, the next Wilfrid had bent over it, and exclaimed, "It is Burton himself. Here, boys, lend a hand, and we will soon get him out. He has scarcely strength left to speak to us."

"Give him a drop first, master," said old Pearson, pulling a flask out of his pocket, and holding it to the poor man's mouth, cheering him the while with encouraging words.

Revived by the cordial, Burton's lips tried to utter aloud the words of thanksgiving that his pious heart was echoing, and tears of gratitude rolled down the cheeks that had become aged by his sufferings. Then, without delay, his friends began the task of excavation, and the efforts of three strong men, digging, pushing, and carrying away the snow, were not long in being rewarded by seeing the head and shoulders of the poor man completely released from their icy tomb. It was now seventeen hours that Burton had been in this fearful situation. On his first leaving home, he and Rover had gone boldly forth on the well-known paths, and at the end of half an hour had succeeded in recovering one of the sheep, when, seeing what he thought was another of his flock upon the top of a ridge of snow, Burton began to ascend the steep, but all at once he found himself plunged in an extensive drift, and sinking

quickly, he was speedily so deeply embedded that all his efforts to extricate himself from his horrible position were fruitless.

“Thoughts of home

‘ Rushed on his nerves and called his vigour forth
In many a vain attempt,”

until at length he became firmly fixed as they found him.

It would be too painful to follow his thoughts during the long weary hours that elapsed before the welcome friends arrived. The ordeal must have been a fearful one. Happily, Burton was a pious man. When all was bright before him, as he led his sheep upon the downs in early spring to crop the budding herbage, or when, later in the year, he lay amongst the purple heather and looked upon the glorious view that spread below, he raised his thoughts to Him who made it all, and, as he told his wife at night, such thoughts made twice a man of him, and it kept folks, too, he said, from making beasts of themselves at Palm fair and Michaelmas, when they had been in the habit of turning their minds upwards, and knew what real pleasure was.

Thus, half-buried as he had been, condemned to hunger, pain, thirst, and, it might be, a lingering death, William Burton looked upwards for support, and, although the flesh quailed, his spirit was strengthened, and the frightful trial, whilst it left him weak and helpless in body, had been a time of rapid growth to his soul.

But of all this, of course, Wilfrid and his companions knew nothing ; they only saw before them a worn-out, half-dead man, and when by their exertions they had succeeded in drawing him out of the snow, it seemed doubtful whether he could reach his wife alive. However, they administered more brandy to him, and whilst

the faithful Rover capered about and barked with joy, they took him alternately upon their shoulders, and thus carried him home as quickly as the state of the road would let them.

It was a happy moment that in which they arrived at his own door, and were enabled to deliver him over to the care of Mary, who was almost speechless with excess of feeling. The good news of his being found, spread most rapidly, and neighbours flocked in ; one with a remedy, another to help Mary to put him into a warm bed at once, and another with an offer of fetching the doctor.

It was through some of these, that the rumour of the accident that had happened to the Hawkins' carriage reached Wilfrid, and he, feeling himself no longer needed in Burton's cottage, had hurried on to render assistance if possible to the new sufferers. Then came all the excitement caused by Cherry's injuries, and her having been left at Eildon, and thus although the brave adventurer was being the subject of talk and admiration amongst the servants and neighbours, yet there had been no opportunity of hearing Wilfrid's own account until now, when, after having been again at Burton's cottage to inquire how he was going on, he had returned with a pretty good account to the plentiful board at which his hunger and their curiosity were to be gratified.

The tears moistened Mrs. Bruce's eyes as she listened to her boy's simple account of what he had done ; Katharine showed her feelings by trying with unusual care to prevail upon Wilfrid to eat more than was possible ; Alice clapped her hands every now and then ; Margaret's eyes glistened and her cheeks glowed ; and Tommy said, "I wish I had been with you, Wilfrid."

At this everybody laughed, and Wilfrid, throwing

himself at full length upon the sofa, said, "You would have been lost six times over between here and the lodge gates, Tommy."

"It is a good thing," said Miss Swinton, "that such a ridiculous idea did not enter the child's head before ; as for you, my dear Wilfrid, although, of course, you went out in the storm from the best of motives, I must say that I think it would have been just as well, supposing that other people had found the poor man, if you had stayed quietly at home."

Alas for the effect of Aunt Jane's opinion ! before she had reached the end of her speech, the tired hero had dropped off into a profound sleep.

The first thing that most of the inhabitants of Eildon Manor did on getting up the next morning was to look out of the window to see if the snow was still falling, but Margaret, before she gave a thought to the probable state of the weather, remembered with pleasure that her dear friend was actually under the same roof with her. Next she began to wonder how Cherry had passed the night, and in another moment she had slipped on her dressing-gown, and gone into her mother's room. All was quiet there, and her mother sleeping tranquilly : Margaret paused a moment to watch her, and the tears came into her eyes as she felt how deeply she loved this dear mother, and thought of Cherry's trial in being left as she was alone ; and then, hearing Katharine's voice speaking to one of the maids in the gallery, she slipped round by her own room again to ask if she knew how Cherry was.

"Better," said Katharine ; "mind you do not waken mamma, she sat up till three o'clock, and then Matty took her place."

Margaret went back again to finish dressing, and meanwhile she resolved in her own mind, amongst

other things, the practicability of asking Mr. Todd if she might be the one to sit up with Cherry next night. "I know many girls in the cottages, no bigger than I am, who have such things to do," thought she, "and I do not see why I should be so much more helpless than they are."

Those who did look out of the window were only so far gratified that they saw the snow had ceased to fall, but the leaden aspect of the sky gave no promise of a speedy end to the severe storm ; the cold was excessive, and everything was still wrapped in its thick white covering. Mrs. Bruce did not appear at breakfast, neither did Wilfrid, and when it was over, people appeared scarcely to know what to do with themselves ; the potichomanie litter was still in the drawing-room, but no one seemed to be inclined to return to it ; Alice declared herself sick of the business, and Miss Swinton had some other grand secret on hand, which kept her closeted with her maid for hours. Margaret made one attempt to see Cherry, but nurse stood firm to her orders, and would not let her enter the library, so Margaret shrugged her shoulders, shivered, and then took a book and sat down close to the drawing-room fire, feeling unsatisfied and uncomfortable, but laying it all down to the annoying folly of those who would not let her see her friend.

This, however, she resolved should soon be remedied, and though apparently buried in her book, she was in reality waiting anxiously for the arrival of the doctor, which took place about eleven o'clock. Margaret's quick ear, all alive, caught the first sound of the turning handle as he came out of the library when his visit was over, and, book in hand, she ran to meet him in the hall, with the eager question first of "How is Cherry Hawkins?"

"Going on well, so far," was the answer ; then, cautiously, "but mind only so far ; she must be kept quiet, no racketings in the house, Miss Margaret."

"No," replied she, "but, Mr. Todd, may I not see her ?"

"Great friends, eh ?" said Mr. Todd, smiling ; "the other young lady has just asked the same question of me. Well, but no nonsense and exciting her. Remember that. You may read to her for ten minutes if you like, no longer, and very little talking ; now don't forget, Miss Margaret."

Margaret looked wise and demure, but threw a bright glance at her mother who had followed Mr. Todd closely enough to hear the colloquy between him and her eager daughter. Mrs. Bruce smiled kindly in return, and then took the doctor into the drawing-room, where she wished to consult with him ; whilst Margaret, without waiting for further permission, walked into the library.

Matty rose quickly to resist the intrusion, but Margaret nodded her head, and said, "It's all right, Matty," and then proceeded with a sober face and tip-toe steps to the couch, where she quietly saluted her friend : "How d'ye do, Cherry ?"

"Oh, Margaret, how d'ye do ? I am very glad you have come at last."

"I should have come long ago, Cherry, only they would not let me. Now, however, Mr. Todd has given me leave to come, so I shall stay with you all the day. Matty, you need not shake your head, I know I may, so you can go back to the nursery. Minnie has been crying all the morning."

"It's all that Susan," said Matty, roused up. "She no more knows how to manage the children than a heathen. If I thought you could contrive to keep still and not be mischievous, I would just run up and see

them a bit." Nurse looked very doubtful as she said this.

"Now, Matty, how ridiculous!" exclaimed Margaret; "what harm could I possibly do? You must think me a baby indeed."

Matty still looked uncertain, but all was so quiet in the room; Cherry seemed so comfortable as she lay on her little bed, with the snowy coverlid folded neatly under her rounded chin; the bright, round, comely, pleasant face, with its brown hair brushed smoothly back under the pretty lace-bordered frilled cap, not faded yet by long confinement; a table near with all that she was likely to require; it did seem ridiculous, as Margaret said, that Matty should fear to leave her for a short time.

Then, Miss Margaret, you will promise me to ring if Miss Hawkins wants anything.

"Yes, yes, Matty," said Margaret, rather impatiently, and then nurse, only now half-satisfied, left the room.

Margaret immediately seated herself upon the vacant chair that was by the bedside, and laid her hand affectionately upon that of her friend.

"How nice!" said Cherry, pressing it gently.

"Capital!" replied Margaret; "I have sometimes laughed at old Debby Robinson, when she says, 'Aye, Miss Marg'et, things happen strangely at times;' but really now, Cherry, who would have thought that we should have met again in this peculiar fashion? But are you in pain?" she added, suddenly remembering that it was not so capital for Cherry to be lying in this helpless condition. "I had almost forgotten your broken leg, in thinking how nice it was to have you here."

"My leg hurt me in the night," said Cherry, "so that I could not sleep; but it is not nearly so bad as

Edward Wraxelles' was ; he fell down the stone steps in the play-ground, do you remember ? Mr. Todd said this morning that I was going on very well."

"I wonder how long you will have to lie here, Cherry ; I wish you could come upstairs to my little bedroom, we should be so snug there."

"Edward Wraxelles had to lie still for six weeks," said Cherry, with a shade of trouble passing over her face ; "but I hope it will not be so long as that."

"Six weeks !" echoed Margaret. "Oh, how dreadful ! How dull you would be ! I was thinking that you would be up in a few days, and then we could do such nice things together. By-the-bye, Cherry, do you know potichomanie ?"

"No," answered Cherry, looking puzzled ; "where is it ?"

"Nowhere," said Margaret, laughing at Cherry's mistake. "Did you think that it was one of the Sandwich Islands ? It is only the name of a new kind of work that Aunt Jane has brought with her ; you know, or perhaps you don't, though, but she is always bringing some new fancy or other with her ; and this time it is potichomanie. There are prints, and colours, and glass jars ; and you put the prints inside the jars, and then you paint the rest and varnish it, and it looks beautiful, like 'the Prussian Vase,' you remember, Cherry, that we read together."

"Oh, how nice !" cried Cherry ; "and can you do it ?"

"Yes," replied Margaret ; "we did nothing else the day before yesterday and yesterday morning, but then Katie got cross, and Alice went off, and Wilfrid was lost, and your accident came ; and now Sarah has cleared all the things off the drawing-room table into a heap on the chiffonnière ; but I will show you, if you like. You may have all my materials."

"Thanks, dear Maggie; I should like it very much, only the very first thing, as soon as I may move the least bit, I must write a letter, and that is what I want to ask you to be so kind as to do for me to-day, Margaret; will you write to mamma for me? A very short one will do," she added, seeing Margaret look rather startled, "and I will tell you what to say."

"Very well," said Margaret, "I see. I shall write it in your name, and you shall sign it."

"I am afraid that I must not," said Cherry; "but it will do nearly as well without."

"How lucky," exclaimed Margaret, who was searching for writing materials; "here is the portfolio and all the things on this table, so I need not make any fuss outside. I will sit here. It is not far from you. Now, Cherry, I am quite ready to begin. How queer it seems. Stay, I will put the date first. Now."

"My dear mother," began Cherry, dictating.

"Do you say 'mother'?" asked Margaret, after she had written the words.

"I never wrote to her before," said Cherry, whose voice was becoming thick with a rising sob in her throat, "but Frank always puts 'mother.'"

"Oh, boys are different," said Margaret; "however, go on, Cherry."

"Margaret Bruce is so kind as to write for me, because I am not allowed to move."

"You need not say 'kind,'" observed Margaret, as she wrote; "I like it."

"But I am going on very well, the doctor says," continued Cherry; "I have had not much pain in the night. Mrs. Bruce sat up with me. Everybody is so kind." As Cherry went on dictating these words she seemed absorbed in them so as to have forgotten that they were passing through a third person. "It would

be nice being here, if only you and papa and Frank were here too. Mamma dear, please write to me soon, to tell me how Frank is, and give my dearest love to him. Oh ! if I could only have been with you to do something for him. I kept wishing all the night to be near to you, until I could hardly lie still. Was this very impatient ? I have been better since daylight came ; and I will try not to feel it so much any more. I know what you would tell me to do, and, indeed, I was doing it all the night. It made me feel nearer to you, mamma dear."

Cherry had gone on so quickly at the last, that it was well that Margaret was a quick writer, and, thanks to Miss Connor, well practised in dictation, or she could not have followed Cherry's rapid words. When the last sentence was written down, Margaret waited for more, but no sound coming, she looked round, and saw poor Cherry now overpowered by her sorrow, and trying to choke her sobs by burying her face in the pillow.

"Oh, Cherry !" cried Margaret, as she rose from the writing-table, and went up to the bedside. With a gulp and a great effort Cherry swallowed the rest of her grief, and then turned her tearful face to the light again.

"Never mind, Margaret, thank you. Will you be so kind as to finish with my love to papa, and I am your affectionate daughter, Christina Hawkins."

"Margaret ventured to kiss her friend quietly, as a token of her sympathy, and then returned to the table to comply with Cherry's wishes. Just as she had finished the letter, and was looking for an envelope to put it in, Cherry spoke again : "Margaret, please will you ring the bell ? I should so like a drink ?"

"I can give it you, Cherry dear," said Margaret. Do not let us have Matty in to disturb us."

"But she said we were to ring, you know."

"Oh, yes, an old particular thing: we need not mind her; we are not the children;" and, so saying, Margaret went for the cooling drink that was standing near.

"I wish you would ring," murmured Cherry.

"Nonsense," said Margaret, holding the glass to Cherry's parched lips.

It is doubtful whether the poor girl's longing for the refreshing liquid would not have aided Margaret's perverse determination, but at this moment Matty entered the room, and seeing Margaret in the act of raising the sick girl's head, she burst into a torrent of reproaches, only restrained from violence by the presence of the invalid.

"Now, Miss Margaret, just like you. Always must be meddling. Didn't I charge you not to give Miss Hawkins anything, but to ring for me. Here, my dear," this last in a soothing tone to Cherry; "you're sorely in need of it, all in a fever as you are. Poor dear, now you'll have your medicine. There, and then you'll lie quite still, and maybe get a bit of sleep, nice and refreshing. What is it, honey?"

Cherry was pointing to the letter, and now said that she should like it to be sent to the post.

"To be sure it shall," continued Matty. "To your mamma, my dear, I dare say." Cherry gave a sign of assent. "Missis will know the address, so we'll have it finished and sent off to the post in no time. Now, honey, you'll be easy." As she spoke, the good nurse, with a few skilful touches, made all comfortable and pleasant about Cherry, and then telling Margaret to follow her, led the way out of the library. Once outside, and out of Cherry's hearing, her indignation broke out.

"I thought you'd had more sense, Miss Margaret, nor have gone and excited that poor child up with your foolish ways," she began.

"I didn't, Matty," interrupted Margaret. "I was only writing to her mamma for her, and I am sure she would have been much worse if she could not have it done, when she wished so much for it."

"No, no, Miss Margaret, it is no use arguing this time. She's of a blessed disposition, and once find she couldn't have it, she would put letters and such nonsense out of her head; and then to give her a drink too, when you know nothing about the doctor's orders. You may have stopped the bone from growing with your awkwardness."

"What is the matter, Matty?" said Mrs. Bruce's gentle voice beside them at this moment.

"Matter, ma'am," cried Matty, waxing still more wroth; "why that Miss Margaret, ma'am, has been sitting with the young lady, and they've been writing letters and crying and exciting themselves, and then Miss Margaret must be giving her a drink, which it is the most dangerous thing she could have done."

"Mamma," said Margaret, warmly, "Matty is making the very worst of it; I only just wrote a note for Cherry to her mamma."

"And made her as feverish as she was when the bone was set yesterday afternoon," added Matty.

"Well," said Mrs. Bruce, waving her hand towards the disputants, "let me hear no more about it just now. I am going to sit with Miss Hawkins, so you can go back to your little ones, Matty, and you, my dear, had better not see Cherry again to-day: you should be very careful with a person in this state."

Without waiting to see the effect of her gentle reproof, Mrs. Bruce passed into the library. Then nurse,

with a grunt of half-satisfaction, went upstairs to her own undisputed dominions, and Margaret was left to her reflections. These were anything but amiable ones, for she felt herself decidedly ill-treated, and it was with hasty and angry steps that she began to mount the staircase to her own room. On her way she accidentally met her sister Katharine, who cried out, "Where have you sprung from, Meg? Tommy has just been asking if you were lost in the snow."

It needed only this to bring out Margaret's woes, and whilst she was earnestly detailing them, a half-closed door opened, and Miss Swinton came out, deeply interested in the whole affair, as affording a pleasing little excitement for a dull morning.

Just before this, Miss Swinton had been grumbling at the partiality shown to Margaret, in allowing her to go into the sick-room, to the exclusion of her elders, but now the tide was turned, and in the revival of an old and long cherished jealousy of Matty, she began to sympathise strongly with Margaret.

"Your mamma indulges that old woman until she thinks herself, I believe, the real mistress of the house. I am sometimes quite afraid lest any stranger should hear the very familiar manner in which she addresses the whole family. Then her accent too. I am sure it is a marvel to me that you do not all speak this barbarous Dales-tongue. I shall really try to prevail upon your mother to dismiss Matty, and have a younger woman—one who could make fashionable dresses. It would be a decided saving in every way."

"Dismiss Matty." With these words the whole current of Margaret's thoughts suddenly turned. She had been angry against Matty with the same sort of naughty feeling that she might have had when a child in the nursery, but it was quite separate from any vin-

dictiveness or desire to get rid of the offender. Dear Matty, all her many kind deeds and words, the sense and good principle that made all the young ones lean upon her, came into Margaret's mind, and it was well that just then Simmonds, Miss Swinton's maid, appeared with a head-dress in her hand, and an important query about the adjustment of the flowers drew Miss Swinton's attention completely away, or Margaret, by a quick reply, might have contrived, as she so often did, to bring her aunt's indignation down upon herself. As it was, the cap proved more interesting than Matty, and Miss Swinton retired from the discussion.

"Aunt Jane takes up things so strongly," remarked Katharine; "the idea of parting with Matty is preposterous, and too ridiculous to have come from anyone but herself."

With which oracular words Miss Bruce, leaving Margaret leaning against the seat of the passage window, proceeded to descend the stairs.

CHAPTER VI.

Close up his eyes, and draw the curtains close,
And let us all to meditation.—SHAKESPEAR.

By the time that the family assembled round the dinner-table, Margaret had almost forgotten her little disagreement with her dear old Matty; not so, however, Miss Swinton. An innocent inquiry of Wilfrid's, bringing the reply, that Cherry was not so well, was feverish, and that Mr. Todd had been sent for, gave his aunt the opportunity she desired, and, without reserve, she gave her sentiments upon the occasion, as to Matty's want of fashion, her vulgarity, and general unfitness for her place.

Mrs. Bruce was surprised and distressed; she defended Matty for some little time, and then, finding it was of no use, with a sigh, she cut short the unseemly discussion, by saying that she must go back to her invalid; and then Wilfrid, taking advantage of the movement, slipped behind Margaret's chair, and said, "Let us get out of this, Meg. Come with me."

Margaret complied at once; and, as her seat was near the door, did so, as she supposed, quite unperceived. In this, however, she was mistaken; for little Tommy's sharp eyes, as usual, were on the watch, and he cried out, "Where are they going? Let me come too, Margaret." But he only called down a stern refusal from his aunt, who said that little boys, at least, must be taught to behave themselves, if big girls forgot good manners entirely. Meanwhile, Margaret, taking care not to listen to her aunt, followed her brother quickly. . .

"I say, Meg," were his first words, as soon as they were outside the door, "come over with me to see Burton. You don't mind the snow?"

"No," said Margaret, much astonished, "I don't care about the snow; but why do you ask me to go with you, Wilfrid?"

"Why don't I ask Alice, do you mean? Well, to tell you the truth, that poor thing, Burton's wife, was crying, and saying Miss Margaret had never been to see her in her trouble; so I thought you would like to go."

"To be sure," said Margaret; "I'm glad you told me. Wait a minute, and I'll come." And so saying, she sprang upstairs, and, in not much more than the time she asked for, appeared in her usual dress of rough jacket and black hat, but with her feet well guarded by a pair of immense snow-boots.

"That's right," said Wilfrid; and they were setting off, when Margaret stopped, and said—

"Oh, Wilfrid, I wonder if cook would give me a piece of that pudding? It would be so nice for Burton, poor man."

"I rather expect that Burton is past pudding," said Wilfrid, half to himself; for Margaret had almost flown along the kitchen passage, in her eagerness; and then he began to whistle in an abstract way, and beat a tattoo with his stick upon the wooden seat of one of the hall chairs. It was clear that his mind was preoccupied, or he would never have so far forgotten the quietness that had been so strictly enforced in the neighbourhood of Cherry's room.

Whether the whistling had attracted Miss Swinton, or whether she had merely happened to be leaving the dining-room, she certainly appeared in the hall at the very moment in which Margaret issued from the kitchen, bearing in triumph a basin tied up in a cloth.

"Margaret! going out?" exclaimed her aunt.
"What can you be thinking of, my dear?"

"I am going to poor Burton's, aunt," said Margaret.
"He is much worse, Wilfrid says."

"I wonder that Wilfrid is not in the same condition," said Miss Swinton, angrily; "I never saw such children in my life. I desire, Margaret, that you will give up this mad idea at once, take your things off, and sit down quietly in the drawing-room with your work;" and so saying, the lady passed along, not waiting to see her command obeyed, perhaps because she had a suspicion that it would be disregarded.

"Come along, Meg," said Wilfrid, after a moment's silence.

Margaret stood undecided.

"Why you know it is not like mamma, nor even Matty. If one minded aunt Jane, one might never do a thing."

There was some truth in this, yet Margaret hesitated.

"Well, Margaret, I never thought you would have stood still when there was some kindness to be done," said her tempter. "A word from you would cheer up that poor weak Mary amazingly. They are all in a shocking state, and if you saw what they wanted, you could get it sent to them."

Margaret was persuaded, but the zest of the enterprise was gone for her. She was far too thoughtful to be easy at the idea of thus acting in direct opposition to the wishes of one of those whom she was bound to respect, and the deep snow was more cumbersome to step over, and the cold more intense than it would have been if they had set off before Miss Swinton appeared. As for Wilfrid, he had never thought at all. To cheat Aunt Jane was generally considered a lawful frolic, and this scheme, begun in real kindly feeling,

was carried on with more ardour now that it had met with Miss Swinton's disapproval.

With some difficulty the two at last arrived at the cluster of cottages, of which Burton's was the first. The heap of snow before the door had been partially shovelled away, but the thick deeply-set windows were half blocked up, and it was semi-darkness within the house. This consisted principally of one long, low raftered room, with a small lean-to building opening from the end, and used as a sort of scullery. A table stood under the window opposite to the entrance, and a large fireplace projected a long way into the room. Opposite to the fireplace stood a bedstead hung with dark blue and white checked curtains, and round the bed were standing several persons, at first difficult to recognise in the dim light that pervaded the room ; and the mingled groans and exclamations proceeding from some of them, and the crying of a group of children huddled together near the fireplace, made an unexpected noise that quite confused Margaret's faculties.

Wilfrid had stepped forward with the half-formed words of "Well, old fellow," upon his lips, when he stopped short, and a piercing scream from the bedside followed immediately. "Aye, poor thing, that was his last," said one voice, in low half-breathed tones, and then whispered directions and remarks followed amongst the neighbours who had gathered together to help poor Mary, and support her under her heavy affliction. For heavy it was—the husband, but three days ago her strength and pride, was now lying dead before her.

"It's overed, Mr. Wilfrid," said the gardener, coming forward when he perceived who it was that had entered the room. At the sound of his name the widow stopped her loud cries, and rising up, stretched out her arms and said, "Ye couldn't save him for me, Mr. Wilfrid. It

was not the hand o' man that could do that. The arm of the Lord was stretched out to destroy, and no man could save. But blessings on you, Mr. Wilfrid, for ye brought him here, even to his own doors, and his head has rested on my arm once more, and his eye lighted on me, and I've heard him speak t' me, afore he left me for iver—for iver ;” and as the poor creature repeated the words her voice rose to a louder, shriller key, and, ending in a scream, she fell down upon the foot of the bed overpowered.

Wilfrid only waited to see her carefully tended by her sister and the other women, and then he turned to look for Margaret. She was standing just where he had left her, within the doorway, petrified with horror at the awful scene before her. When Wilfrid came near to her, and taking her hand in his, led her out again, she submitted without a word, and in the same silence they walked back through the snow to their own door.

As they paused for a minute on the steps before entering the house, Margaret looked at Wilfrid, and was about to speak, when, affected by the sight of the unwonted gravity of his countenance, or it might be relieved by the effort to express herself, she burst into tears. Wilfrid did not know how to console her, he could only touch her shoulder affectionately, and say, “There, never mind, Meg ;” but, finding that did not answer, he bethought himself of Matty, the unfailing resource, and, bringing Margaret into the hall, he went to the foot of the stairs and called so loudly, that he brought Matty from one quarter, and his mother from another.

“What is the matter, Margaret, my dear? where have you been?” exclaimed Mrs. Bruce, and “Miss Margaret, my dear, what's come to you?” said Matty, both in amazement.

"I took Margaret to see Mary Burton," said Wilfrid, "and when we got there, William had just died."

This simple explanation was enough to call forth much more sympathy than censure ; and with the greatest tenderness, both mamma and Matty took Margaret up to the nursery-fire, turned the children out, and devoted themselves to comforting and making her warm. But as soon as she was tolerably calm, Mrs. Bruce felt herself obliged to return to Cherry, and Matty being soon after called away, Margaret was left to her own reflections.

These were naturally very solemn ones. For the first time in her life she had seen death, and the effect upon her was, as it must be, most awful. Thought after thought went coursing through her mind, and then after all, so true is it that sin is the sting of death, came the consciousness that she was not so good as she ought to be, as one who was looking forward to being an heir of a better world should be striving to be ; the last fault hung heavily upon her, the having gone to the cottage against her aunt's desire ; and although she did not fully see that this was only one of the many instances in which the wilfulness and self-seeking of herself and her brothers and sisters were exhibited, still she knew quite well that she had done wrong, and, feeling weak and miserable, she at last betook herself to the refuge which alone will comfort those who are thus oppressed, and, perhaps for the first time in her life that she had done so at an irregular hour, she prayed.

To resolve always for the future to mind Aunt Jane, however tiresome her orders might be, was only one of her good resolutions after she rose up from her prayers ; and she was in the midst of forming other plans for a change in her conduct, when she was roused by a little hand pulling at her gown, and a baby voice saying,

"Come, Margaret." It was Minnie, who had escaped from Katharine's care, and had crept upstairs for some toys she wanted to play with in the drawing-room. Margaret, thus roused from her reverie, which might have lasted for hours, as far as she knew, snatched up the child, and, in a sort of wild excitement, began to dance about with her. This was all very well for a few minutes, but after that Minnie, with the pertinacity of childhood, remembered her toys, and would let nothing else amuse her until she had got Margaret to reach her the box that she wanted from a high shelf, where their best and most rarely-used toys were kept. Then she would go back to the drawing-room, and Margaret must go with her. Still, as in a dream, she complied, and led the little girl downstairs to the drawing-room, where there was no one but little Tom and Katharine. One thing that had made them all feel so unsettled and uncomfortable for the last day or two was the absence of their mother from the corner where she had always hitherto been found, and it was a sort of pleasure to find Katharine in her place, quietly occupied with some fancy work.

"Oh, Meg," said Katharine, looking up as her sister entered, "do you know that William Burton is dead?"

"Yes, I know," said Margaret, shortly.

"Poor man," observed Katharine, folding her canvas carefully in four, to find the middle. "It is very shocking. And after Wilfrid had taken so much pains to find him too. I wonder, by-the-bye, if Wilfrid knows."

"Yes, he knows," said Margaret, decidedly, and without wishing to enter into any more explanation.

Katharine seeing that Margaret was in what she called a bad humour, said no more, but busied herself with the amusing task of commencing a new pattern, and then her sister, taking up a book where it had re-

mained since she last laid it down, seated herself within reach of the firelight, and was soon quite engrossed by it.

Without disturbing either of the sisters, the two children played, and disputed, and screamed, and made peace again, and even the lamp, and afterwards the tea equipage were brought in, and tea-pot, caddy, and steaming kettle had all waited some time without awaking Katharine to a remembrance of her duties as her mother's deputy. At last they were roused by the entrance of Alice, noisy and talkative as usual. "Why, you are all sitting like mice here," she began, "and I have had such fun. I have been watching a snow-balling match amongst the servants."

"You have not been amongst them, Alice?" said Katharine, sharply.

"No, no," replied Alice, laughing carelessly, "I watched them from the passage window. Joseph was sweeping the path across the yard, but every now and then he stopped to make some snow-balls, and when Anne came out quite innocently, he had one ready for her, and hit her just at the back of her neck. I expect the wet snow went down her back, for she was in an immense rage. You know what a vixen she is, and she called the other maids, and they all came running out to help her to revenge herself. And they belaboured Joseph well, and I believe they would have rolled him in the snow, only that stupid old Adams came in, and said something to them that made them stop at once, and go into the house as solemn as judges."

"He told them of Burton's death, probably," said Katharine. "I wish you would make tea, Alice."

At another time Katharine would have complained of Alice's interest in the servants' affairs; but just now it was convenient to ask her to make tea, so she kept her opinion to herself about the other matter.

"So I will," said Alice. "It will be great fun. Aunt Jane likes it strong, I think. She shall have it good to-night;" and she began to ladle spoonful after spoonful wholesale into the teapot.

"Stop, stop, Alice," cried Katharine, "it will not be fit to drink. How ridiculous you are!"

"There then," said Alice, as she dropt in a lump of sugar as a finale, and proceeded to the kettle, from which she filled the teapot to overflowing. She had just finished watering the fire-irons and polished fender, as Miss Swinton and Wilfrid came into the room, and she hastily returned to the table, put the teapot down, and then with an air of importance said, "Here, children, here is a lump of sugar for each of you, now be off to the nursery."

"The children downstairs at this time of night!" exclaimed Miss Swinton. "Your cousins Emma and Henry would both be in their cribs and fast asleep an hour ago. It is the worst thing you can do, Alice, to give them sugar. I wonder, Katharine, you do not interfere. That old Matty is worse than nothing. The poor children had better have no nurse at all."

"What, darlings, up yet?" said Mrs. Bruce, entering the room. "Give me a kiss. Good-night, now run to Susan, and don't make any more noise as you go upstairs. Take them to the nursery, Anne," she continued to the maid who had just come in with bread and butter.

"How is Cherry, mamma?" asked Margaret.

"Very poorly indeed, my dear," replied her mother, taking her seat at the tea-table. "Mr. Todd looks serious, and insists upon her being kept very quiet. There are symptoms of fever."

Margaret looked sad, but said nothing.

"Well, Margaret," said Miss Swinton, as the business of tea went on, "I hope that you took my advice,

and did not go out this afternoon. I hear that the unfortunate man is dead."

Margaret turned red ; but remembering her good resolutions, hesitated what reply to make, and Wilfrid answered for her.

"It was my fault that she went, Aunt Jane ; but no one could tell that poor Burton would die so soon. The doctor thought he might linger for some days."

Katharine and Alice looked quite mystified. This was the first of their hearing of their sister's escapade.

"What, Meg, have you been out in the snow-storm ?" said the latter, with a reproachful glance at her brother ; whilst Katharine said, "You don't mean that Margaret was at poor Burton's when he died ?"

"If she was, Katharine," said Miss Swinton, severely, "I trust that she has received a shock that will make a salutary impression upon her. She certainly deserved some punishment for her obstinacy."

This was the finishing stroke. Overwrought feelings, uncertainty what reply to make, and much annoyance, combined to overpower her, and Margaret burst into tears, leaned her head upon her hands, and sobbed passionately. No one spoke at first, though Katharine looked fiery, and ready to break out, only she scarcely knew where to begin, there being no decided grievance to protest against. Wilfrid and Alice exchanged glances, and Miss Swinton, who had not intended to produce such an effect, looked rather startled, and uncertain what to say next. Then Mrs. Bruce, herself much distressed, leaned forward to the place where her daughter was sitting at a little distance from her, and putting her hand tenderly on her shoulder, said, "Margaret, my dear, compose yourself. Your aunt speaks only for your good."

"It is not that," sobbed Margaret hysterically.

"It was very dreadful for her," said Wilfrid in a low voice to one of his sisters.

"Well, take some tea, darling," said her mother, soothingly, and then you shall go to bed; that will be best for you."

"Faugh," exclaimed Wilfrid, making a face of disgust, chiefly with the good-natured view of causing a diversion. "Some more sugar, please, mamma."

"The tea is much stronger than usual, Katharine," said Mrs. Bruce, as she complied with her son's request.

"I don't think Katharine made it," said Miss Swinton, tasting hers with a critical air. "Alice was busy with the teapot when I came in, and quite right too. I was glad to see her trying to make herself useful. I wonder, Ellen, that you do not let the girls take your place by turns. The Swintons, Georgina and Alicia, always do that, and I must say that Georgina presides most elegantly."

If there was one thing more than another that put Katharine in a rage, as Alice said, it was the having Georgina Swinton stuck up as an example; accordingly, in a state of virtuous indignation, she took up the word and said, with dignity, "I must say, Aunt Jane, that I think mamma knows quite well what is proper for us, without imitating my Aunt Swinton."

"And I hope that mamma will always make tea for us herself," said Wilfrid, "and let no one interfere, not even Alice."

"Nor your poor Aunt Jane, I suppose," said Miss Swinton, with a sigh. "Well, well, headstrong spirits must have their day. And so poor Cherry is no better," she added, with a magnanimous air, and changing the subject with a visible effort, as if in pity to the young cavillers. Mrs. Bruce answered the query, and a little more conversation ensued between them, during all

which Margaret, by a strong effort, had so far attained composure, that she was able to drink some tea without choking, and listen to what was going on. After a while, however, Miss Swinton returned to an unpleasant subject.

"When does Miss Connor come back?" she asked.

"On Tuesday, I expect," answered Mrs. Bruce. "We shall all rejoice to see her, shall we not, Alice?"

"So, so, mamma," said that young lady, returning her mother's smile with a saucy glance. "I do not see why she should come back before the end of Wilfrid's holidays; however, if the snow-storm is to last till Easter, as croaking Adams says, I suppose we may as well be doing lessons as nothing at all."

"True, O king," cried Wilfrid, ironically. "Bravo, philosophy. There is nothing like contentment; nevertheless, I trust that the sun will shine again long before Easter."

"Because I was thinking," said Miss Swinton, playing with her teaspoon in an absent manner, "that Miss Connor, although an excellent young person, is scarcely sufficient now for these elder girls. For Katharine we have a plan." At this Katharine started, and looked up indignantly, first, that she should be considered to need a plan; next, that she should have been kept in ignorance of it; "but," Miss Swinton calmly continued, "as for dear Margaret here, it is my firm opinion that a year at a really good school would be the very thing for her." This time the sensation ran round the table. Miss Connor's insufficiency was an old subject of discussion between the sisters, and Mrs. Bruce had often been made very uncomfortable, and, in spite of herself, a little suspicious, by Miss Swinton's suggestions, but she had never yielded to the wishes of the latter, so far as to exchange her present quiet painstaking governess

for a more fashionable lady, or a genuine Parisienne, and this last speech she only regarded as a similar attempt, to be warded off as usual. The others however, angry, injured, or amused, according to their respective dispositions, were scarcely satisfied, when their mother gently replied,—

“Not school, Jane. Their father would not have liked that for any of his girls. Miss Connor is young, but I think she will do nicely for them yet awhile, if they will attend to her and take pains.”

“Take pains, to be sure I will,” said Margaret to herself, touched by her mother’s gentle answer; “Miss Connor shall be enough for me;” and Mrs. Bruce getting up as she spoke, to return to Cherry’s room, Margaret seized her hand in passing, and pressed it with an affection that would have fain expressed all that she was feeling at the time.

Miss Swinton, left alone with her nephew and nieces, and feeling herself decidedly in the minority now, waived the subject of discussion, and speedily recovering her good humour, she exerted herself to amuse the rest of the party, and her anecdotes and lively stories about her numerous friends and acquaintances proved so attractive, at least to Katharine and Alice, that the remainder of the evening passed over in a much more pleasant manner than might have been prophesied from the commencement.

CHAPTER VII.

Patience and resignation are the pillars
Of human peace on earth.—YOUNG.

WITH the morning's light, the heaviness of Margaret's sadness had passed away, and she awoke to a new day, possessed of a degree of cheerfulness that she could not have believed possible amidst the misery of the night before. But during the day many things served to remind her of her previous horror, and the remembrance fastened upon her with a firm hold that she could not shake off. People would talk too about poor Burton's death. During the morning Matty was sent down to see if she could be of any use, and when she returned, dilated largely upon the painful scene. The scared looks of the poor children, and the unchecked grief of the poor mother, who had nothing to rouse her to exertion, because an aunt and sister, hearing of her misfortune, had come across from a neighbouring dale, and taken all trouble off her hands, so that Mary had nothing to do but to sit rocking herself backwards and forwards, still keeping to her first wretched cry, "They couldna save him for me. Oh, my Willy!" all these were described minutely, until Margaret seemed to see herself once more in the cottage, beside the dying man, and the only thing that really would, as she fancied, have been a comfort, and that was to see Cherry, was not allowed, for Cherry was still feverish, and guarded strictly by her two faithful nurses, Mrs. Bruce and Matty.

The next day things were better, for the snow at last had ceased, and some paths near the house being swept,

the inmates were able to go out and breathe the invigorating air, to the great refreshment of all, including Margaret; but even here, the curling smoke from the cottages could be seen, and when the gardener came near, Miss Swinton, with Margaret's arm safely locked in hers, would begin to ask after his relations, and hear in return a long account of their calamity, with a description of the funeral as it was expected to be, which was to take place on Sunday afternoon, as is often the case in the country, and to which half the Dale were coming as a mark of their respect and sympathy. In Margaret's gloomy state of mind, it appeared as if everyone combined to speak of what she did not like to hear, and when the next day Wilfrid was bidden to attend the funeral, she shuddered, and marvelled within herself how her brother could hear of it so calmly.

Happily for Margaret, Sunday morning was bright and fine, and the roads being partially cleared, they were able to go to church as usual. The long brisk walk through the snow, the accustomed services, did her good, and made the past few days seem like a dream, and it was not until she had to pass the white-curtained window of Burton's house, and saw the signs of woe about the door, that her gloomy feelings returned.

She was sitting after dinner, with a book in her hand, but gazing moodily into the fire, when her mamma came into the room, and said, "Would you like to sit with Cherry for an hour, my dear? she is quite well enough, I think, to be glad of your company."

Margaret started up, with an involuntary smile, and Katharine said, "It is well, mamma, for Margaret has been so dull ever since her unsuccessful nursing the other day, that I was afraid that she was never going to smile again."

Margaret scarcely heard this remark, or her mother's

answer, so great was her anxiety to take advantage of the long-delayed permission, and a few minutes found her in the library, where Cherry was alone, expecting her. The last few days had made an alteration in the young invalid : although in reality better, her face had lost a good deal of its roundness and fresh colour, and she looked like a person who had been very ill, and was still weak ; but the placid expression was there, and the open hearty smile, as she warmly welcomed her friend. Everything about her was clean and fresh and pleasantly arranged, and a little vase of sweet flowers gathered for her by Katharine stood upon a little table near her.

"Now this is comfortable," said Margaret, after the first greetings were over ; "what shall we do first, Cherry ? Would you like talking or reading the best ?"

"I should like to hear the Psalms and Lessons first," said Cherry, "if you would be so kind, Margaret. There is always afternoon service to B——, and either papa or mamma will be there now very likely : perhaps both of them, if Frank is better."

Margaret complied at once : she read carefully and pleasantly, and Cherry listened with attention. When the books were closed, there was a little pause, until Margaret broke it by saying—

"Did you ever read to anyone who was ill, Cherry ? I once went with Miss Lavinia to see Debby Robinson, and she made me read to her ; it seemed so strange."

"Oh, yes," said Cherry, smiling. "I have a nice old man who is blind, and I go and read the Bible to him every Monday afternoon ; and then there is Harriet Thomson, poor thing, she never learnt to read, and she has a spinal complaint, and she always lies on a couch beside the window, making pretty things that the

woman she lodges with sells for her, and I always go once a week to read to her."

"By yourself?" asked Margaret.

"Yes," answered Cherry. "Papa or mamma sometimes call for me, but both Harriet and old John live so near to our house, that I can easily go alone."

"Don't you feel awkward, Cherry? I should. Indeed, I should not know what to say to them."

"Oh, no," laughed Cherry. "Mamma went with me the first time, and showed me what I ought to do. When I have finished the chapter—the Second Lesson it always is—John Harden says, 'Thank you, Miss. It is a blessed book. It gives sight to the blind, and comfort to all!' and then he often asks me to read him the 146th Psalm. I say it, because I know it now by heart, and he repeats it softly after me. Oh, he is such a good old man. Mamma says that I ought never to come away without learning something good of him, he is so contented and joyful, because he is so good."

Cherry was interrupted by the entrance of Matty. Her appearance startled both the girls, for she was dressed entirely in mourning, and had a black silk hood on, through which you could only catch a glimpse of the border of her white cap, and her sharp, but kindly features.

"I just looked in to see if you wanted anything, Miss Hawkins, my dear. Are you all straight and comfortable? That's right. Now Miss Margaret, love, you'll be sure to run to your mamma in the drawing-room if anything is wanted particular, and I'll wish you both a pleasant afternoon. You see I am bidden to poor William's funeral, or else I would not have left you so long;" and with these words, in rather a hurry, and with an evident enjoyment of her errand, the good old Matty left the room.

"How dismal Matty looks in those horrid black things," said Margaret, looking sufficiently dismal herself as she spoke.

"Yes, they are sad," said Cherry. "She told me all about the poor man's being lost in the snow, and his being brought back only to die, and about his wife's distress. It was very shocking, but still it must have been a comfort to her that he was brought to his own home to die. That was all Wilfrid's doing. It was very brave of him. Frank will be so pleased when I tell him. He is so proud of Wilfrid, always. Mamma says that Wilfrid is Frank's great hero."

Margaret smiled faintly at her brother's praises, and then she said, "I wonder why they make everything so dreadful about a funeral? I am sure it is bad enough without that."

"I suppose that it is to show people's grief," said Cherry, "but I have often thought too, Margaret, that it should not be all so black and gloomy. There seems nothing to remind the people of the bright world that their friends are gone to, at least, until they get into the churchyard, and then you know, Margaret, there are the words that tell everything. 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' That is so beautiful. It does seem very strange, Margaret, does it not? that any one can do wrong after they come home from a funeral; one would think that they would be always so careful, and pray, and try to prepare themselves for heaven; but it is not so. I think it shows how much sin there is left always." Cherry spoke as if she was half thinking to herself all the time, and Margaret had silently listened, but now she said,

"It would be very miserable, Cherry, to be always thinking about funerals and such things. It is well if people can forget."

"Oh, but, Margaret, I don't mean thinking in a miserable way, but I mean that people must see how truly good they ought to be, and that there is nothing else so really important as being holy; and yet men get drunk the very next day perhaps, and women do things that are wrong too. That is what is so strange."

"Perhaps they cannot help it," said Margaret.

"Oh, Margaret," said Cherry, almost reproachfully, "of course they could help it. If they prayed and tried, Jesus," and Cherry bowed her head as well as her recumbent posture would allow, "Jesus would help them."

"I know, Cherry," said Margaret, with difficulty restraining her tears, "I was not thinking."

But Margaret was not used to talk on these solemn subjects, and as she said no more, a silence followed, which Cherry broke by saying,

"I wanted to ask you, Margaret, about the poor man's children, because I was thinking that I shall have to lie here a long time, but soon I shall be able, I hope, to use my hands, and then I might do something for them."

Margaret was only too glad to talk about the little Burtons, for if she mentioned them to Katharine or Alice, they rarely cared to listen, and she was fond of the children; so with great pleasure she entered into Cherry's benevolent ideas, and was in the midst of describing the number and size, and probable wants of the children, when Mrs. Bruce appeared, having looked in, she said, to see how they were going on. She smiled when she saw them talking so happily together, but pointed to the fire, which was hollow in the middle, and fast dying out.

"Oh, mamma," said Margaret, with a little blush,

"we were having such a nice talk, that I never thought of the fire."

"It was my fault," said Cherry, "for I saw it, but I thought that I would leave it just one moment and one moment more, before I interrupted you. I hope that it will not go quite out."

"We will ring for Susan to show her skill over it," said Mrs. Bruce; "and now as it is four o'clock, I will give you your draught."

The draught was swallowed, and Susan came to doctor the fire, which she was doing successfully, when Tom and Minnie, taking advantage of her absence, escaped from the nursery, and made their appearance in the library with a shout of triumph at finding themselves, at last, within the forbidden precincts. When they saw Cherry, a stranger to them, pale and lying flat in bed, their mirth was rather softened, and Tommy stood for a minute looking at her, with his hands clasped behind him, whilst Minnie stole gently a little nearer to look at the phenomenon.

The sight of their happy little faces was a refreshing change to Cherry, and she begged that Susan might not carry them off with her. Mrs. Bruce consented to their staying a little while, but as they began to grow riotous again in a few minutes, she desired Margaret to go with them into the drawing-room, where they generally spent the twilight hour, and Margaret, however unwillingly, obeyed. She might perhaps at another time have protested against the arrangement, but beside Cherry, an example of patience, she hardly dared; so taking the children by the hand, she quietly withdrew.

Poor Cherry's powers of endurance had very soon to be put to a more severe test than they had yet been, for Monday morning brought her tidings which naturally threw her into a state of the greatest anxiety.

The last accounts of Frank had been good and hopeful, but to-day a note arrived from Mrs. Hawkins with very different news. Frank was much worse again. There had been no going to church for either father or mother on Sunday, as Cherry had fondly imagined; the day had been spent, instead, in watching by the boy's bedside, in listening to his ravings, and in applying with anxious care all the remedies suggested.

"My dear Cherry," wrote the almost heart-broken mother, "must prepare herself for enduring whatever it may please God to send. If it be His will to take our darling Frank from us, we must bend our will to His. And we must not forget that it will be good for Frank to be taken away from this world of pain and sin to heaven, where all is holiness and peace, where the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the Light, and where all tears shall be wiped away. Dear Cherry, if Frank dies, you must think very much of heaven, and of the gain it is to him, and try by perfect patience to please our Heavenly Father, who is doing it all for some good purpose. But as yet your dear brother lives, and we are not forbidden to hope, although the hope is very slight, and we may pray that he may be spared to us; it is only to prepare you for the worst that I thus write to you. It has been very comforting to have such nice tidings of you, my sweet child. We can scarcely now regret the accident that has kept you away from the sight of all this suffering. Your father calls me, and I can write no more. Your ever affectionate mother,

"C. HAWKINS."

Poor Cherry. She was nearly stunned at first, and no tears came to relieve her. She laid the letter in Mrs. Bruce's hand, who was beside her, and then closed her eyes, as if weary. It was not until by tender sympathy

Mrs. Bruce had contrived to make her speak a little of her anxiety, that she cried, and then the tears rolled quietly down her cheeks, and her voice was very soft and low, as if she were near some one asleep, and many times that day her hands were clasped and her eyes closed, and no one disturbed her then. Margaret went in to see her, but did not stay long, it was plain that Cherry could not talk. A sweet smile was given to her friend, but all her dearest thoughts and interests were far away.

The next day there was no regular post, and it was impossible for everyone not to be very anxious for Cherry's sake, to know if a special messenger would be sent to relieve her suspense. But the morning passed away, and no news had come, and Cherry's face grew more and more flushed, and it was only by a great effort of self-control that she could keep still. At last Alice's quick wits suggested a ready chance of communication. Miss Connor was to arrive to-day, and Miss Connor would take post-horses at the very town in which Frank lay. There were difficulties, seeing that Miss Connor's movements were quite unknown to the Hawkins's, and she was as ignorant of theirs, yet still Alice clung to the idea, about which, however, nothing was said to Cherry, and she watched eagerly for the arrival.

At last, from her post of observation, the staircase window, she perceived a fly in the distance, and presently it approached nearer, and in time drove up to the door. Most of the family came out at the first sound of the door-bell, to greet the new comer, and there was no doubt of the welcome ready for the amiable young lady, who entered very cold with her journey, but smiling to see them all again. Alice, ever, was the first to rush forward, give her a

violent kiss, and say, "Have you brought any news for Cherry Hawkins?"

"Yes, my dear, I have a letter for her," struggling to free herself from Alice's embrace.

"Oh, you darling creature," cried Alice, kissing her again.

"You must really leave me alone, my dear," said her governess; "or I cannot open my bag."

Alice endeavoured to assist in the operation, but thereby only caused delay; at length, however, an envelope was drawn from the neat receptacle, and then Alice, regardless of embargos, dashed with it into the library, where she held it up triumphantly. Mrs. Bruce, who was sitting beside the fire, looked up quite startled by the impetuous entrance, but Alice, although this was the first time she had been near the invalid, merely exclaimed, "Here is your letter, Cherry."

Cherry received the letter, but her hands trembled so that she could not break the seal.

"I will do it for you," cried Alice, quickly; and in an instant she had torn it open.

"Read it, please," said Cherry faintly. She could not have seen the words herself, and Alice began at once.

"My dear Cherry, I am thankful to be able to tell you that our dear Frank has passed the crisis, and is now, we trust, out of immediate danger. Your dear mother is worn out with watching, and I have persuaded her to lie down for a little while on condition that I wrote to you. Frank is very weak, and so much altered that you would scarcely know him, and I have to stoop down to hear him when he speaks, but he has passed the turning point of his disorder; and Dr. Eliot says that he may rapidly recover. If you do not hear

from us again before the regular post-day, you may be sure that he is progressing favourably. And now, my brave girl. . . .”

“Oh! I need not go on,” said Alice, breaking off suddenly, and throwing the letter down upon the bed, “that part will keep. But, Cherry, let me kiss you. I am as glad as if Frank was my own brother, next to Wilfrid. By-the-bye, I must go and tell him;” and away Alice darted again, leaving Cherry full of trembling happiness to the no less warm, but more gently expressed sympathy of Mrs. Bruce.

Just outside the library door, Alice found her sister Margaret, who, though longing to hear the news, had had the forbearance not to follow Alice into the room, and stayed to give her the pleasant tidings before she proceeded to seek Wilfrid. Margaret could not resist the temptation of seeing Cherry’s happiness, and, peeping in, was encouraged to go further and express her delight and sympathy, but she did not stay longer than a few minutes, and then went to the drawing-room, where she found Katharine and Miss Connor standing before the fire, the latter warming herself, whilst Katharine poured out an account of the incidents of the last fortnight. On hearing Margaret’s tale, Katharine looked extremely glad, and Miss Connor expressed her pleasure in having been the messenger of good news. It appeared that Mr. Hawkins himself had come to the Inn to seek a messenger for his note, when Miss Connor was waiting for her fly, and the landlady had mentioned the young lady, and volunteered that she would bring it, which Miss Connor readily confirmed.

Everybody sympathised with Cherry as soon as the good news spread through the house, and the gloom of the last few days being removed, riotous spirits seemed to be the order of the day. Cherry’s room alone, by

Matty's care, was sacred from the lawlessness and noise that prevailed elsewhere ; Margaret especially, roused from her melancholy, ran into the other extreme, and she talked nonsense with Alice and Wilfrid, and teased Katharine, and laughed at her aunt, in total forgetfulness of all her good resolutions. Miss Connor might well wonder how all these wild spirits were ever to be reduced to anything like order and dicipline.

CHAPTER VIII.

Do all things like a man, not sneakingly.

GEORGE HERBERT.

THE next day, however, brought the sobering change. A fire lighted in the schoolroom, and everything placed in wonderful order, and Miss Connor herself, the picture of quiet regularity, seated at one end of the table directly after breakfast, waiting for the attendance of her pupils, were sufficient reminders that their work-a-day life had begun again, and in spite of yawns and groans, and a fruitless effort on the part of Alice to put off the commencement of lessons until after Wilfrid's departure, the girls found themselves speedily involved in a well-known routine of French, music, and history, grammar, drawing, and geography; in fact, as Alice expressed it, they were again fixed upon the treadmill of science and accomplishments.

To do Margaret justice she did not grumble after the first dull morning, but, spurred on by the remembrance of her aunt's threatenings, as well as by some good resolves of her own, she threw herself so vigorously into her studies, that, although she had always been considered the clever one of the family, she now astonished Miss Connor, as much by her industry as by her capacity. She had an extra stimulus just now, too, which must not be forgotten in reckoning up the mixture of good and bad motives by which she was influenced; she had Cherry's admiration; for Cherry, although so good and steady, was behind Margaret in acquirements,



Wilfred goes back to school.

every way to be both industrious and amiable; and that



Wilfred goes back to school.

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and stared at the long German exercises, and the names that Margaret could, when she had no headache, so easily.

Cherry was quite able now to receive Margaret's visits, and hear all that was going on, for good news came every post-day to help her to recover, and at the end of another week she had the pleasure of receiving a little visit from her papa. Being able now to leave his son without uneasiness, he was glad to return to his re-assembling pupils, and spent a few hours on his way, with Cherry and her friends, full of gratitude for the kind care that she had met with, and of thankfulness for her recovery.

Mr. Hawkins' visit was speedily followed by the departure of Wilfrid, whose holidays were now over. There was always a blank in the house when he went away, his hearty manly ways, his cheerful voice, and his gay whistle were sorely missed ; as for Alice, she regularly cried for a whole morning after his going, and Miss Connor was obliged to resign herself to the infliction. But she soon recovered, and was lively and mischievous and careless as ever.

By this time Cherry had become a part of the family, and was going rapidly through different stages of convalescence. First, moved to a sofa in the library, and visited by every one ; then transferred to a couch in the drawing-room, where she became a companion to Mrs. Bruce, and a model girl, for the time being, for Aunt Jane ; until at last she was found in the schoolroom, as much by Miss Connor's desire as her own, and there shared the advantages of regular instruction, as much, at least, as she could bear, with her friends.

It was something new to them to see one so desirous of obeying the wishes of their governess, so anxious in every way to be both industrious and amiable ; and that

not by fits and starts, like Alice, nor because she enjoyed the learning, like Margaret, but from a steady habit of doing the work that came to hand, with pains and cheerfulness.

Margaret made her friend a study. At first she tried to argue some points with her ; but Cherry's simple answering was far remote from arguing, so Margaret settled the question, as she often did, silently to her own satisfaction, that Cherry was naturally more good than most people, so it was no use trying to imitate her, or to have her set up as an example ; indeed, Aunt Jane did that so forcibly that people were sure to be disgusted, not encouraged, by the experiment.

Happily, they never thought of being jealous of their friend, and the more she was able to join in their pursuits the more they liked her. Katharine was no exception ; perhaps she was attracted by the degree of respect she received from Cherry, so different from her own young sister ; and soon she became fond of her, taught her new kinds of work, and honoured her by her confidence.

Cherry's next step was to be promoted to the use of a pair of crutches, contrived by, and made under the eye of, her doctor ; and with these she felt quite independent, and now could well have made the journey to Maskham, but that she waited for her mother. Mrs. Hawkins, in her turn, was obliged to wait for the breaking up of the long storm before Frank could be moved in safety ; and she was very thankful that an elder sister of her husband's was able to undertake her duties at home, and thus enable her to remain with Frank, who, though convalescent, still required a mother's care.

It seemed as if the storm would never break up ; for six weeks longer the ground remained hidden by its thick white coat, icicles still hung from the roofs of the

houses, and all the brooks were frozen. In spite of the kindness of her friends, and her growing love for them, it was impossible for Cherry not to watch with some anxiety for the change of weather, which was to be the signal for her preparing to receive her darling mother and her brother Frank. At last it came. One morning when they awoke a dripping of water was heard, the sun was shining, and the hitherto unbroken expanse of white snow was fast changing into a mass of soft mud ; it was, as Adams expressed it, a "grund thaw," and they might soon expect the roads to be quite clear. With next postman arrived the letter from Mrs. Hawkins, desiring Cherry to get ready, and accepting Mrs. Bruce's invitation for her to spend a night at Eildon on her way.

The letter came as usual, about eleven o'clock, and Cherry being summoned to receive it, a complete desertion of the schoolroom took place. Katharine, who had been drawing, went with Cherry ; and Margaret and Alice, taking advantage of Miss Connor's momentary absence, rushed off too ; and little Tom was only stopped from following them by the return of his governess at the very moment when he had accomplished the descent from his high chair. Of course he began to roar loudly, because he was not allowed to go with his sisters, and Miss Swinton, whose ears were everywhere, looking in directly to inquire the reason of the noise, more blame fell upon Miss Connor than upon Master Tom.

"It is but natural," said his aunt, "that the poor child, who knows no better, should try to follow the bad example of his sisters. You will never be able to make Tom and Minnie behave properly, Miss Connor, unless you exert yourself to preserve regularity and good order amongst the elder ones. Excuse my offering this advice ; but it is a singular thing that this little boy is always perfectly good with me." With these

words Miss Swinton walked off, leading the said little boy, now triumphant, by the hand, and left poor Miss Connor to groan over despised authority and disagreeable interference, or to bear it patiently, as best she might.

In the drawing-room Miss Swinton might have continued her lecture, for the benefit of the girls, had not her attention been at once diverted by the sight of a letter for herself, which she instantly seized and opened, regardless of the talking and lamentations which Cherry's recall was giving rise to.

"Humph!" exclaimed Miss Swinton, after she had run her eyes down a page of her epistle; "very kind of Louisa, I am sure, and such an advantage to dear Margaret. Here is a note for you too, Ellen, doubtless repeating the invitation."

Mrs. Bruce looked up surprised, and Margaret, attracted by hearing her name, left her sisters, and came round to her mother's side.

"My sister Swinton," explained Miss Jane, whilst Mrs. Bruce was opening the note addressed to her, "is so kind as to invite Margaret to go and pay a long visit to Oakington. It is the very thing for her, as I am sure you will see, Ellen, particularly when you consider that she will have the advantage of occasional sea-bathing, as you know they are only seven miles from the coast, to say nothing of the society of her accomplished cousins, and the care of a French lady of the highest attainments and the most admirable system. You must perceive that dear Margaret's health needs a change; her complexion is not clear; she is always dull; and, without doubt, would be benefited by some months in a well-regulated schoolroom."

The word "health" made Mrs. Bruce give an anxious look at Margaret; and certainly her wretched appear-

ance at that moment rather confirmed Miss Swinton's account of her, and the refusal, which had been Mrs. Bruce's first impulse, was changed into the hesitating reply, "I do not know what to say about it, Jane. It is very kind of her Aunt Swinton, but you know my girls have never been away from home since poor Katharine was sent to Oakington five years ago."

"Except Margaret's visit to Mrs. Hawkins," said Miss Swinton, whose memory rarely failed. "I wonder you can hesitate, for this is a real advantage, and besides, as their guardian, I consider that John has a right to see his nieces sometimes."

"That is true, Jane," replied Mrs. Bruce, meekly; "but you know their home was always to be with me. Still, if it would do Margaret good—however, let us defer the subject, we will talk it over afterwards."

"As to that, Ellen," said Miss Swinton, "you will perceive that Louisa begs for an immediate answer, chiefly on account of some arrangements she is making with a music-master, whose lessons she kindly wishes Margaret to share. I should like to send an answer by the early post to-morrow."

"What is it, mamma?" said Katharine, coming at that moment from the other end of the room, where she had been good-naturedly listening to parts of the letter that Cherry was reading with delight.

"An invitation for Margaret to stay at Oakington," answered her mother. "I had rather hoped that your aunt would have been inviting you; however, in this note she tells me that she only defers your visit until next spring, when she intends to take you to London, with Georgina."

"That is sensible of her," said Katharine; "I have no wish to go and mould at Oakington; but a spring in London would be palatable, even with Georgina as

my companion ; but you won't let Meg go, will you, mamma ?”

“ I am rather thinking of it, my dear,” said Mrs. Bruce. “ There are such good masters at B——, and it is so kind of your aunt to invite her.”

“ Well, I suppose it is all right,” said Katharine, carelessly ; “ but I know I have a miserable recollection of my visit there when I was a small child ; but I was younger than Meg, so I suppose, less able to take care of myself. However, come now, Cherry, we have no time to lose. Here are your legs,” and handing the crutches, which Cherry still sometimes used, she went away with her, followed by Alice.

Mrs. Bruce sighed deeply, for all this reminded her sadly of the time that Katharine referred to, that of Mr. Bruce's illness and death, when Katharine had been sent for three months to Oakington, to be out of the way. Margaret did not go away with her sisters ; she was quite stunned with the prospect before her ; the idea of being separated from her mother was terrible, and a suspicion that the plan was all her Aunt Jane's arrangement, made it all the more odious to her, and at length she slipped round to the other side of her mother, and taking hold of one of her hands, said, “ I need not go to Oakington, need I, mamma ?”

Mrs. Bruce almost smiled at the intense eagerness of Margaret's tone. A visit to young cousins in a very large country-house would not have seemed a great evil to most girls ; but Mrs. Bruce knew what made it appear so dreadful to her much-indulged daughter, and she kissed her, and said kindly, “ It would be very nice for you in many ways, darling ; and after the first, I dare say that you would enjoy it very much.” With her Aunt Jane so near, Margaret would not begin to argue that point, and when Mrs. Bruce went on to say,

"Had you not better go back to Miss Connor now, my dear?" for a wonder she did not make any excuse to linger but went away.

In the hall she met Alice coming for her. "I say, Meg," she began, "this poor thing has been crying, I believe."

"What, Cherry?" said Margaret, hurriedly.

"No, Miss Connor. I suppose she has taken our leaving her to heart; but she is as cross as possible now, and insists upon our returning to our studies."

"I am sure that I cannot study any more this morning," said Margaret, quite indifferent to Miss Connor's crossness. "Have you heard, Alice, that I am invited to stay a long time at Oakington?"

"No, really," said Alice; "and are you going?"

"I am afraid that mamma will not say, No," answered Margaret, mournfully; "and I am convinced that it is all Aunt Jane's doing."

"Most likely," said Alice, coolly; "but how horrid for you, Meg. That French governess they have is so strict that they never have any time to themselves: it is work, work, from morning to night."

"Yes, in that dreadful schoolroom at the end of the long gallery, away from everybody. I remember how wretched I was when I went with mamma for three days."

"And Aunt Louisa just coming in after breakfast to kiss them all round, and ask if Madame wants anything, or if they have all been good and industrious, and then Madame answering with a grin, as much as to say, 'I should like to see anything that I could not settle myself, without your assistance.'"

"Oh, Alice, how dreadful!" cried Margaret.

"And then the parading in to luncheon under Madame's wing; and if they happen to speak in a

natural way to any of the visitors, woe betide them, for that creature's eyes and ears are everywhere."

"The only thing is the splendid music-master," said Margaret, her face growing longer and longer.

"And two hours' practising for him before breakfast every morning that your turn comes. Oh, Margaret, I'd rather go off to school. There might be some fun there ; but none at Oakington, I defy you. Madame turns everything into blue marble."

"I cannot go, Alice," said Margaret, speaking desperately.

"I'll tell you what," cried Alice, struck by a sudden thought, "I'll tell you what ; get Sir Thomas over to your side, and he'll persuade mamma."

"There's no time," sighed Margaret, "Aunt Jane wants to send the answer to-morrow morning. She will write to-night."

"Let us go to Cudthorpe after dinner," said Alice, boldly, "and bring Sir Thomas back with us."

"How can we, Alice?" said Margaret, half reproachfully ; "they would never allow us to go."

"We will not ask them, then," said Alice ; "there can be no possible harm in us two going together to speak to our guardian about an important matter. What a coward you are, Margaret ; you look quite scared. Now just leave it to me. Only attend immensely to your history this morning, and keep her in a good humour."

"Alice and Margaret," said the lady politely designated as "her," appearing at this moment through the green passage-door, behind which was the one leading to the schoolroom, "what do you mean by gossiping here, instead of returning to your studies ? I beg that you will come into the schoolroom at once. I am seriously displeased with you." The words were commanding, but the tone was soft and low as usual.

"Now for a penitent face," whispered Alice to her sister, as they followed their governess to the school-room, and took their usual places at the table.

"I wish first to tell you," said Miss Connor, "that I cannot permit such irregularity to go on. It is impossible to obtain any permanent result from your lessons if you allow your minds to be distracted by every event that is passing in the house. To leave the room in my absence was also reprehensible, little Tommy might have done it, but from you I should have expected more consideration."

"We were so anxious about Cherry, Miss Connor," said Alice, still preserving the humble manner that she had put on at first; whilst Margaret, with a distressed air, was turning over some books that lay before her.

"I will allow that our anxiety about dear Cherry has unsettled us a little," said Miss Connor; "and I will accept that as a slight excuse."

"And she has to go to-morrow," said Alice; "at least, her mamma is coming to-morrow."

"Is it so?" said Miss Connor. "How much we shall all miss her. But now let me ask you to put away all thoughts of your friend, and make up for idle time by great attention to your history. Have you the books ready, Margaret?" Poor Miss Connor was easily mollified by a little attention on the part of her pupils; any angry feelings she might have had were subdued, when she saw that Margaret, though by a great effort, was trying to attend, and that Alice was taking what for her was extraordinary pains. An hour and a half's uninterrupted study almost effaced the remembrance of the previous disturbance. When they had finished, Margaret left the room to prepare for dinner; Alice purposely stayed behind, preferring to be alone with Miss Connor whilst she carried out her scheme.

She professed to be putting some books away very neatly, and whilst so occupied, she sighed and said, "Poor Cherry! Shall we not miss her horribly, Miss Connor?"

"Very much indeed, my dear," said Miss Connor, quietly, "she is such a pleasant, cheerful companion."

"And her going away is so sudden, too; we have no time to make up our minds to losing her," continued Alice.

"Not so very unexpected," said Miss Connor. "You know, my dear, we have long been aware that she must go as soon as the snow disappeared."

"Yes, to be sure," replied Alice, amiably. "But still she has only this afternoon to pack up in, and everything. Oh, Miss Connor, will you excuse our lessons this afternoon?"

"I do not know, my dear," said Miss Connor, rather surprised at the sudden request; "there has been so much idleness lately. Half an hour and five minutes lost this morning."

"Oh, we are very sorry about that, Miss Connor," answered Alice; "and you might take it out of us another day. Only do give us holiday this afternoon."

"I do not like the approach to what is called slang, that you so frequently indulge in, Alice," said her governess. "I wish you would take the trouble to find a proper mode of expressing yourself. And, my dear, do not fancy that by taking extra pains one day, you can entirely blot out the neglect of the previous one. I may forget it, but the bad effect to yourself remains. However, I do not want to deprive you of the pleasure of being with your friend to-day. You must ask your mamma, and if she has no objection, you may have the holiday."

"Oh, never mind asking mamma," said Alice, rather

pettishly, "Aunt Jane would interfere just for contradiction, and then it would be all up with us."

"Alice, I will not hear you speak in this disrespectful manner of Miss Swinton," said Miss Connor, gravely. "You had better go away now, I do not wish to talk any more to you at present."

"Oh dear, I get wrong every time I open my mouth sometimes," said Alice, in a tone of distress. "Do, dear Conny, forgive me, and let us have the holiday;" and with these words, she fearlessly put her arm in a coaxing way round Miss Connor's neck, as that lady sat at the table.

"If your mamma has no objection, yes. Now run away," said Miss Connor, still somewhat disapproving, and Alice, with a kiss of thanks, left the room triumphant. Fortune favoured her; as she crossed the hall, she met her mother alone.

"Mamma, Miss Connor has given us a holiday this afternoon, if you have no objection."

"Very well, my dear. For Cherry's sake, I suppose," said her mother, smiling, and passing on into the drawing-room without stopping.

"Not exactly for Cherry," Alice began, hesitatingly, and, in spite of herself, with a blush upon her cheek; but her mamma did not hear her, and Alice, after trying, with a sort of deep sigh, to get rid of a certain uncomfortable feeling, went upstairs to tell Margaret.

"I don't think it will do any good," said Margaret, moodily, when she heard that they were to have holiday, and could therefore have the afternoon at their own disposal.

"We can but try," said Alice. "And now, don't you go and spoil all our plan by blabbing to anybody. It will be all right when we bring Sir Thomas back with us."

"I don't half like going without telling mamma," said Margaret.

"And Aunt Jane," said Alice, mockingly. "You had better be packing up your things for Oakington, Margaret."

"Well, I shall certainly tell mamma, if she asks how we are going to spend the afternoon," said Margaret, beginning to move away.

"You will get me into a fine scrape if you do. So I warn you," said Alice, as they separated.

Margaret was quite pre-occupied during dinner. Cherry, fluttering between the delight of so soon seeing her dear mother and Frank again, and her natural regret at the thought of leaving the friends who had been so kind to her, could still observe that Margaret appeared to avoid her. The fact was, that although Margaret would not confess it even to herself, she was conscious that the sort of underhand work she was engaged in would not bear the light of Cherry's truthful eyes, and so she did not care to talk much to her.

As soon as they left the dining-room, Alice hustled Margaret away, and begged her not to lose a moment in getting her things on.

"I must just tell Cherry that we are going out, Alice," said Margaret.

"Nonsense, Meg," said Alice. "You will ruin all if you do."

"I must, Alice," persisted Margaret.

"How stupid! Well, you must make her promise not to tell."

Margaret, however, had gone after Cherry, and said to her, "Alice and I are going out by ourselves, but we shall be back before very long, I hope. I would not have left you to-day if I could have helped it," and then back to Alice in a few minutes.

Without time for another thought, they hastily dressed themselves, and quietly slipped out, pretty secure of not meeting anyone at that hour, when everybody was resting after dinner. They did not, however, breathe freely until after they had turned a corner of the carriage-road that would hide them from view, because of an awkward habit of their Aunt Jane's, of frequently looking out of the drawing-room window ; but having turned the corner, Alice said—

“Now, it is two miles to Cudthorpe. Wilfrid can do it in half an hour and five minutes, so I think we may manage it in three-quarters easily, ten minutes to satisfy Miss Lavinia and get hold of Sir Thomas, and rather more than three-quarters to come back with him ; and you see we shall be at home again before twilight. Come along, Margaret.”

Animated by her sister's energy, Margaret quickened her already active steps, and the two walked on without pausing, or looking back, rarely speaking, solely intent upon accomplishing their journey in as short a time as possible. They went by the same road as Margaret had gone with Katharine on the memorable day of the snow storm and Aunt Jane's arrival ; for even Alice durst not try Throstle-gill to-day, knowing, as she did, that at this time of year the Beck was often much swollen.

How much it was swollen they could see when they reached the bridge, for under it the foaming waters were rushing rapidly, carrying small bushes and much rubbish along with it, and rising far above the ordinary level on both sides. The road up to this point had been very wet and dirty, but after they had crossed the bridge, it was not so bad, and they could step more easily. In passing through the village, many people spoke to them, and said, “A fine day, ladies,” “Grand weather this,” or “A fresh afternoon, mum ;” but the

girls little heeded them, and by the end of the three-quarters of an hour they had reached the gates of Cudthorpe.

"Shall we ask for Miss Gresley or Sir Thomas?" said Margaret, as they crossed the court and rang the bell.

"Miss Gresley, I suppose," replied Alice, "or she might be vexed."

The old maid-servant who admitted them smiled grimly in welcome, and, with a glance at their muddy boots, asked them to please to walk in. She paused a moment in the passage to give them time to remember the large mat that lay there, and then ushered them into the prim, old-fashioned drawing-room, where Miss Lavinia, looking as cold and stiff as the brown holland covers, sat at work at one side of the round table, opposite to her nieces, Elinor and Emma, who were each engaged in sewing a long seam, their daily employment at this hour.

"Alice and Margaret Bruce," exclaimed Miss Gresley, putting down her piece of work, taking off her spectacles, and coming forward to greet the girls after the usual fashion. No doubt, it was a most welcome relief to the young workers to see their friends, but it was not until they had read consent in their aunt's face, that they ventured to put down their sewing, and come to shake hands.

"And where are the others?" was Miss Lavinia's first inquiry.

"We are by ourselves," said Alice, whilst Margaret blushed, and allowed Elinor to hold her hand.

"Has not that governess of yours come back yet, then?" asked Miss Gresley, looking curiously at Margaret.

"Yes," answered Alice; "but we have holiday this afternoon."

"Holiday to roam about the country by yourselves, I suppose," said Miss Gresley. "Well, well, it is not your fault, and I am glad to see you after this long storm; so sit ye down, and warm yourselves, and tell me how your mother and the rest of you are at home."

Alice gave a satisfactory report, and her questioner continued—

"And that poor thing, Cherry Hawkins, has not left you yet? A contented, good child, from all accounts."

"She goes away the day after to-morrow. Her mamma and Frank are coming for her," said Margaret, for the first time venturing to speak.

"Indeed," said Miss Lavinia. "You do not look any the better for being shut up there for six weeks, Margaret, you want a change of air."

"Oh, no," said Margaret, eagerly. "Indeed, Miss Lavinia, I am quite well."

"I am glad to hear it," said Miss Gresley. "I dislike to hear children fancying themselves ill; but you want freshening up, child. Some asses' milk would do you good."

"If you please, Miss Lavinia, is Sir Thomas in?" said Alice, who was sensible that the minutes were slipping away fast.

"I think he has gone over to the pheasantry," said Miss Lavinia. "Have you brought a message for him?"

"No," replied Alice, "but we want very much to see him. Please may we go to him?" she added, rising.

"Go through the dirty farm-yard, child?" exclaimed Miss Lavinia; "impossible. Sit ye down and have a piece of cake. My brother may have come in by the time you have finished it." Miss Lavinia then went to a large old-fashioned closet at one end of the room, and began to rummage in it.

"We cannot stay long," persisted Alice. "We

should not dirty ourselves if you would allow us to go for him."

"What, have you been bidden to be at home by a certain hour?" said Miss Lavinia, emerging from the closet with a deep china plate in one hand. "Nay, then, I will not be the one to hold you. And I am glad to see, Alice, that you are beginning to be more thoughtful, as becomes your age. Elinor, go to Gregory and tell him to seek your uncle, and to say that Alice and Margaret Bruce are here and wish to speak with him immediately."

Elinor quitted Margaret's hand reluctantly, yet obeyed at once, leaving her young friends to eat seed-cake, and answer Miss Lavinia's questions with as much patience as they could summon to their aid.

"Should Sir Thomas not be found," was the dreadful supposition that now crossed their minds—"what then? To return alone to Eildon—their perilous escapade quite fruitless—to brave the consequences unsupported. It was enough to make them look very uncomfortable, and cause Miss Gresley, with her sharp powers of observation, to be pretty sure that something was going wrong. Surely their guardian's kind, cheery voice was never so welcome as now, when, after five minutes' purgatory, they were saluted by—

"Well, young maidens, what do you want with me?"

"If you please, Sir Thomas," said Alice, whilst shaking hands, "if you would be so kind as to walk home with us."

"Eh, what? no one ill, nothing the matter I hope?"

"No," replied Alice, not quite liking all this questioning.

"Does your mother want me?"

"No," said Alice, again.

"This is mysterious," said Sir Thomas, with a sort

of chuckle. "Then I suppose it is some little private business of your own?"

"Yes," said Alice, unable to keep herself from blushing.

"And I am to be your cavalier home, am I?"

"If you will be so kind, Sir Thomas," said Margaret, now raising eyes tearful in their earnestness.

"Come along then, we had better set off directly, for I have private business of my own to attend to this afternoon."

"You spoil them sadly, brother," said Miss Lavinia, in a stately manner. "I cannot tell what they want with you that could not be settled here. However, it is better that you should go with them, than that they should be tramping about the lanes at twilight by themselves; I wish, brother, that you would speak to their mother about it. That young governess of theirs does not half look after them."

"They would be safe enough, sister, without me," said Sir Thomas. "If two strong lasses like these cannot take a two-mile walk, they are poor things. Come along. I have an arm for each of you."

"Shall Andrew follow with your horse, brother?" said Miss Lavinia, after the girls had taken leave, and been charged with messages for Katharine and their mother.

"Yes, yes," said Sir Thomas, "perhaps he may as well; then I can ride down and speak to the farrier myself about the roan."

So saying he left the house, followed by his two young wards, who made a respectful bow to Miss Lavinia, and were glad that they could get away.

CHAPTER IX.

When we are wretched, where can we complain,
And when the world looks cold and surly on us,
Where can we go to meet a warmer eye
With such sure confidence, as to a mother?—J. BAILLIE.

ANXIOUS as the girls had been to procure the ear of their guardian, it was curious to see how shy and reluctant they were about using the opportunity when it came. They actually passed through the grounds, along the road, and to the end of Sonnysides, and had talked about every external object that came to their notice, without beginning the only subject that they really cared about. In the end it was Sir Thomas who began.

"By the bye," said he, "you have said nothing yet about this important business of yours that is bringing me out this cold winter's day. Do you want some money?"

"No, thank you," began Margaret, "it is only——"

"That Aunt Jane has been making Aunt Swinton invite Margaret to go and stay a long time at Oakington," broke in Alice, "and Margaret does not want to go, of course, because Oakington is such a horridly dull place, and my cousins have the most dreadful governess, a French one," added Alice, remembering that Sir Thomas had a particular aversion to French governesses; "and Margaret would have to be always with her, and she would be certain to be very miserable, and besides, she does not want to go away from home."

"A famous bunch of reasons," said Sir Thomas, smiling. "You are a good pleader, Alice, but what are your mother's wishes upon the subject?"

"I don't suppose that mamma wants to send Margaret away," said Alice; "but Aunt Jane has got it into her head that Miss Connor is too young for us, and that Margaret needs a change, so we expect that she has made it all up, and will get her own way."

"And there was only to-day," put in Margaret. "The answer has to go to-morrow morning."

"Quick work, indeed," said Sir Thomas; "but what am I to do?"

"Oh, please persuade mamma not to let Margaret go," said Alice, earnestly; while Margaret looked anxiously up to Sir Thomas's face to see what effect it was having on him.

"I see, I see," said he; "but you know Miss Lavinia is somewhat of the same opinion as your aunt; however, we will see what can be done. As far as I can tell, Miss Connor seems an excellent young person, but I suppose the women-kind know best. So you don't like strict governesses, Margaret?"

"Yes, I do, some," she replied; "but Oakington, oh, Sir Thomas, you don't know how dreadful it is."

"Well, well, don't fret, my dear. We will see what can be done. Only it is true that your uncle, when I was over there, did say something about having you by turns to stay with them, and I agreed with him that it might be a good plan. That makes it awkward. However, we'll see, we'll see." And as this phrase generally meant that Sir Thomas would contrive to get them their own way entirely, the girls felt their previous fears somewhat allayed, although not quite set at rest. But there was yet another request to make, and as they drew nearer home, it pressed upon them, Alice at

least, the more urgently ; nevertheless, it was not until they had passed the lodge gates that even she had courage to prefer it.

"Sir Thomas," she began, in a coaxing voice.

"Well, my dear, what is it now, something for yourself, eh ?"

"Not exactly ; but please would you be so kind as to go in as if we had not come for you. I think mamma does not know that we are out."

"What, what," cried Sir Thomas, with almost as near an approach to anger as he ever showed ; "is there something behind the scenes that I have not been told ?"

"No ; only," said Alice, a little frightened, "we had a holiday, so we thought—"

"We asked for a holiday that we might come," amended Margaret, innocently, "but they don't know at home that we were coming for you—that we were going out at all."

"Oh, indeed," said Sir Thomas, a smile and a frown contending on his face ; "you were in a sort of scrape, and you slipped off to get me to help you out of it. Take care that you have not got deeper in. No, Miss Alice, I am sorry to say that I can't pretend I wasn't sent for. We don't pretend at Cudthorpe. We always like to go in the high road, in broad daylight ; we find that bye-lanes and twilight lead us into ruts and pitfalls. But there, never mind, my girl, don't be distressed, you did not mean it, I dare say. Hold your head up. Come. Here we are."

They had reached the house. Sir Thomas now opened the hall-door for them, and they went in, a little afraid of what might be in store for them, if their expedition had been found out.

Found out indeed ! It seemed as if Miss Swinton

had been lying in wait for them. No sooner had they advanced three steps into the hall, than she sprang up beside them, with a face of triumphant wrath. "Oh, here you are! A pretty time for young ladies to be out alone. And pray where have you been rambling to all the afternoon? There has been nice work going on I think, whilst my poor sister supposed that you were safe in the schoolroom. Oh, Sir Thomas, how d'ye do? Well, I am glad to see that my nieces were not without protection. Perhaps you will be able to give us some account of them. It is in vain to apply to their governess."

The gist of this last part was directed at Miss Connor, who had just come into the hall, pale and anxious.

"Here, Miss Connor," she continued, "you will probably be relieved to find that your pupils have returned safely to your care, thanks, I expect, to Sir Thomas Gresley's kindness," turning with grim courtesy to that gentleman.

"No, no, madam," said he, "do not think that it is owing to pains of mine. Alice and Margaret came over to Cudthorpe this afternoon to fetch me, and they have brought me. That is all. There is no such great crime, I hope, in employing a holiday afternoon in a walk to Cudthorpe and back."

"A holiday given them for the purpose, I conclude," said Miss Swinton, looking with significance at the intended victim of her remarks.

"I gave them a holiday," said Miss Connor, in a low grave voice, "on condition that Mrs. Bruce approved of it; for the purpose, as I supposed, of spending the afternoon with Cherry. I knew nothing about the expedition to Cudthorpe. I, for one, have been deceived."

Margaret's tears were ready to flow; Alice was de-

cidedly uncomfortable, rather inclined to laugh and brave it out, but restrained by the presence of Sir Thomas ; and Miss Swinton was about to speak again, when that gentleman interposed.

"Well, well," he said ; "it seems rather a complicated matter. I can give no help, so I must leave it to you, Miss Connor ; only don't be too hard upon these girls. They have taken a wrong turning it seems, so just help them back again, and they will thank you for it. My business is with Mrs. Bruce, alone. Where shall I find her ?"

"In the drawing-room, I believe, Sir Thomas," said Miss Connor, to whom that gentleman had addressed himself, to the exclusion of Miss Swinton. "I will look. Yes ; Mrs. Bruce is here," she added, after opening the door.

Sir Thomas thanked her with a courteous bow, and immediately disappeared. Then Miss Swinton's anger broke forth in earnest, and an unpleasant scene ensued. Side-hits at Miss Connor produced saucy answers from Alice, who always took the part of her aunt's victims. Margaret protested against wishing to deceive in the matter of the holiday ; and then, finding that she was only clearing herself at the expense of Alice, took refuge in silence, whilst Miss Connor felt herself powerless amidst the storm.

A rescue happily came in the shape of Matty. There was rarely an event of small or great importance in the house, but Matty was found in the middle of it ; and so now she appeared upon the scene, with only a half understanding of how matters really stood, but with the simple design of getting the poor bairns away from their aunt's fighting, as she called it.

"What ! Miss Alice and Miss Margaret ?" she began. "Where has Sir Thomas been taking you to this damp,

dirty day? for I know he's not far off, by the terrier that Master Tom has spied from the nursery window. Why, your boots are in such a mess, you're not fit to be seen. Sit ye down and take them off, and I'll bring your slippers. And your jackets wet through with the mist! Couldn't ye ha' bided quietly at home? and Miss Cherry's last day, too! Well, come up into the nursery, and I'll see to get you dried."

Miss Swinton knew of old that it was no use attempting to hold the word, in such a case, when the old nurse was there; it always ended in her being worsted, so, with an air of dignity, she wisely retreated from the field.

"When you have changed your dress, come back to me," said Miss Connor, and she, too, left the hall.

Then Matty, with much questioning, coaxing, and some scolding, attended the young ladies to the nursery, where a bright fire was no unwelcome sight.

Whilst they were putting on dry things, Katharine and Cherry came in, both very anxious to know where they had been all the afternoon. It seemed that neither Miss Swinton nor Miss Connor had found out their absence until about half an hour ago, supposing them to be shut up with Cherry, as Katharine was; but then there had been a great outcry, which Cherry's limited information had not lessened.

Alice's spirits rose with her audience, and she gave such a whimsical account of the whole affair, that Katharine laughed heartily, and Margaret scarcely recognised that she had been an actor in it. Cherry alone said nothing, and Margaret felt rather than saw that she not approve. As they all went downstairs together, Margaret took her arm, and, lingering behind the others, said, "I believe, Cherry, that you think we ought not to have gone to Cudthorpe?"

"I do not quite understand how it is," said Cherry. "Why did you not ask your mamma not to send you to Oakington, Margaret?"

"Because it would have been no use," said Margaret.

"Then, Margaret dear," said Cherry, with a little hesitation, "if she thinks it right for you to go there, there is an end of it."

"What! that I must go? Go to that hateful place?" exclaimed Margaret. "You don't know how much I dislike it, or you would not be so unkind, Cherry."

"I did not mean to be unkind, dear Margaret," said Cherry, sorrowfully; "but you know it does not make any difference whether we like a thing or not, if it is there for us to do. It will never be so bad as we fear, if we do it because we ought."

"That is all very fine, Cherry," said Margaret, crossly; "but how would you like to be sent away from home for perhaps three months, and," then suddenly changing her tone, as she remembered how Cherry's dearest hopes had been overthrown so many weeks ago, she added, "but of course you do know. I am a brute, Cherry dear; do not mind me. I am very unhappy."

"I wish that I could comfort you, dear Margaret," said Cherry, sweetly.

"It is no use," said Margaret, hastily; and, grasping the hand she held, they went downstairs together.

"Look here, Meg," said Katharine, putting her head out of the dining-room, "we want to consult you about some music to lend Cherry."

Margaret went into the room, but stopped short in a moment, and said, "Alice; you know we were to go into the schoolroom."

"And be lectured like Tom and Minnie. I have no fancy for her, 'Now, my dears, you must be aware, with your good sense.'"

"Oh, Alice! please don't," interrupted Cherry.

"Does it hurt your feelings, my dear?" said Alice, in a tone of mock pity. "Well," she added, more sincerely, "to please you, Cherry, and, as it is your last day here, I will go and hear what my governess has to say upon the subject; and if she does not come out too strong, I will promise you to refrain from speaking my mind openly in return."

"Come, come, Alice," said Katharine, "you will be getting yourself into serious trouble, if you work yourself up in that way."

Katharine spoke with the weight of superior years and experience, and so rarely did she assume the responsibility of an elder sister, that Alice was surprised into silence, and with merely a "Come along, Meg," she left the room.

Whether Miss Connor's gentle admonitions had any serious effect upon them, is doubtful; however, Alice had the honesty to take all blame upon herself, and leave only Margaret's weakness to be censured, and the frank manner as usual had its effect upon their governess, though she did not release them, and they were still sitting rather impatiently with her, when the loud shutting of the hall-door gave notice that Sir Thomas was going, and that the important interview with Mrs. Bruce was over.

As they sat in silence, Margaret caught the sound of her mamma's soft voice calling her; she started up, when at the same moment Mrs. Bruce opened the schoolroom door, and said, "Margaret, my dear, if Miss Connor does not want you, come to my room."

Margaret had the grace to look for permission, and receiving it, she followed her mamma directly.

"Sit down here," said Mrs. Bruce, pointing to a small ottoman, upon which Margaret often sat and chatted

whilst her mamma was dressing. "I want you to read this note ; I wrote to your Aunt Swinton directly after dinner."

Margaret took the letter with a trembling hand, both because of her anxiety to know her fate, which it would probably contain, and also because her mother's way of speaking to her was strange and grave.

The note was short : in it Mrs. Bruce spoke gratefully of the kind invitation to Margaret, but begged to decline it, partly because Margaret's health was such at present, that she scarcely dared trust her in a still more northern climate ; and also because Walter's return might soon be daily expected, and then she should wish all the children to be at home. There were other subjects mentioned, about which Margaret was indifferent ; she read, however, to the end, and then saying only, "Oh, mamma," laid her head down like a child upon her mother's knee and cried.

Mrs. Bruce put her arm tenderly round her daughter, and said, "You see, Margaret, there was no need for you to have called in Sir Thomas. It was all arranged as you wished before he came. I have showed you my letter that you may see how all your fretting and your plans have been wasted. The more straightforward course would have been to come to me at once, and talked about it, and told me freely what you wished. If it was right, you might be sure that it should have been done ; and I thought my Margaret might have been trusted. I never supposed that daughters of mine would have almost told a falsehood ; have certainly deceived their governess, and not trusted their mother."

"Oh, mamma," cried Margaret, "I never thought ; I never intended—"

"I do not know what you could have thought,

indeed," said Mrs. Bruce, "it was so unlike you, darling."

"I am very sorry, mamma," sobbed Margaret, "but, oh!" she added, looking up brightly through her tears, "I am so glad that I am not going to Oakington."

"It is more than you deserve, I think," said her mother, smiling.

"What did Sir Thomas say?" asked Margaret, after thinking for a few minutes.

"He was more annoyed about the matter than I should have expected from him, so very indulgent as he is; but before he left, he had quite recovered his good humour, and very kindly begged me to send you over to Cudthorpe, whenever you wanted a little change of air."

"Oh, mamma," said Margaret, coming still closer to her mother, "I do not want any change of air, only let me stay with you."

"Well, darling," said her mother, laying her hand upon the temples that were throbbing with fatigue and excitement, "then you must exert yourself, and be cheerful, and always do what Miss Connor wishes. I hope that you have apologized to her; if not, you had better go and do so now; her real anxiety about you all has made her very uneasy to-day, I see. I will speak to Alice afterwards."

"Pray, mamma," said Margaret, "do not be angry with Alice. You know that it was all for my sake, as she thought."

"Yes, darling, I know. You were two silly girls," said her mother, with a kiss, and Margaret went away.

CHAPTER X.

Nor did she dare to launch on seas unknown
In search of truth by some adventurers shown,
But her own compass used, and kept a course her own.

CRABBE.

It was true, as Alice had suggested, that the plan of Margaret's going to Oakington was entirely of Miss Swinton's suggestion and arrangement, and therefore it may be supposed that the events of that afternoon were not well pleasing to her; and it was perhaps not surprising that at tea she announced her intention of almost immediately leaving Eildon. No letter, she said, could explain the matter properly to her sister-in-law, whose intended kindness had been so slighted, and she should therefore take advantage of a wish expressed by her dear friend, Lady Alicia Porter, that she should spend the month of March with her, and call at Oakington on her way thither. She had already desired Benett, her maid, to be packing up her wardrobe, and she thought of asking Mrs. Hawkins to give them a seat in her postchaise as far as Maskham.

Mrs. Bruce was always grieved when her sister made one of these sudden flights; but knowing that it would be useless, made no attempt to persuade her to prolong her stay. By way of compromise, before the end of the evening, Miss Swinton promised to come back again as soon as any definite news should be received of the time of Walter's return. By her nieces the announcement was received with mingled feelings: much as they complained of her fidgety ways, and her interference with

them, they were really attached to her, and when they found that she was going away so soon, the love came uppermost, and they only remembered her frequent kindness to them. Perhaps it was the same on her side; for after various sarcastic speeches during the evening, about the independence and want of modesty of young ladies of the present day, and many praises of the unexceptionable propriety of the manners of the young Swintons, borne with patience by the culprits, she at last forgave them, and as a token of it, presented each of them with a piece of fine lace out of her rich stores, saying at the same time, "After all, I do not blame you so much as that poor thing, Miss Connor. You would be good girls, I believe, if it were not for her and that dreadful old Matty."

This speech threatened to disturb the renewed harmony, but the girls had had a lesson to-day, and they were patient.

Mrs. Hawkins and her son did not arrive until the middle of the next day, so there was a nice long morning to spend with Cherry—or rather for Cherry to spend with them, for, of course, no second holiday was asked for, and lessons went on as usual; Cherry, by her own desire, taking her part for the last time. It was well that she did so, for it helped to pass the anxious moments that separated her from those she was longing to see.

At last they came, and the joy of the meeting was sufficient reward for all the suffering that had gone before. To see Cherry so thoroughly recovered, so well, and so much improved in every way, was an unspeakable pleasure to Mrs. Hawkins, who vainly attempted to express her gratitude.

"Nay," said Mrs. Bruce, "you would have done the same for my Wilfrid had he needed it, and indeed,

Cherry has so wound herself round our hearts, that the only difficulty is how to spare her to you."

Truly it seemed so, for as Cherry led her pale, delicate-looking brother round the house to introduce him to her friends, there was nothing but lamentations from every one, from Katharine down to Tom ; and Cherry had to subdue her overflowing happiness, not to appear unfeeling in return.

The next morning, however, when the adieux had to be taken, and she remembered that she had really to go and leave them all, her joy was for the time clouded, and her regrets mingled with theirs. There were so many leave-takings, for she would not omit a single person. Every one in the house received a grateful word and smile at least from her, until at last she came to Margaret, whom Miss Connor had kindly contrived that she should see alone in the schoolroom. Katharine had been wonderfully taken with Cherry lately, and very kind to her ; they had spent much time together after Miss Connor returned, and before Cherry was able to go into the schoolroom ; but Margaret was still the friend, and now in the last quarter of an hour all their mutual affection came out without restraint.

"I don't know what I shall do without you, Cherry. I shall be so dull, with nobody to speak to," began Margaret.

"But you have Katharine and Alice," answered Cherry.

"Oh, Cherry," said Margaret, reproachfully, "you know I never could talk to them as I do to you. Katharine would laugh at me, indeed she would not listen, and Alice would not understand."

"Fancy me then, Margaret, with no sister at all. I have often wished lately that I had a sister. I do not mean to say that I am dull at home, but then I

have so much to do, because papa and mamma have only me, you know, and I believe that is the nice way that things are arranged ; if people have sisters, they need nothing else, and if they have not, then they have so much to do, that they cannot be dull."

"Oh, Cherry," said Margaret, fondly, "but you are different. I wish I was as happy as you are."

"Dear Margaret, I wish that I could comfort you," said Cherry, "and do you know, I am ashamed to say it, because you are so much cleverer than I am, but I believe it is wrong to be unhappy."

"But if one can't help it, what then?" asked Margaret.

"I think people can help it if they try," replied Cherry. "Not all at once, but by degrees, and if they pray for it at the same time ; of course they could not without that. You know, Margaret, God means people to be happy, because He makes the flowers so beautiful, and everything so beautiful out of doors ; the sky and clouds, and even stones and insects, and water and stars, and everything ; and more than that, letting people love us so much, and be so kind."

"But if people have troubles, Cherry, what good are flowers and stars to them then ? I should think it would make a person far more miserable if they were ill or had some great misfortune, to have a stone brought to them, even if it had one of those fossils in it that you are so fond of."

"Now, Margaret," cried Cherry, with a little merry laugh, "you know I don't mean that. One would not bring them a stone then, one would be very kind, and soft, and gentle to them, that would be bringing love to them, and that is something beautiful, is it not ? You all brought it to me when I was ill. And besides, Margaret," continued the young girl, becoming grave again,

"I believe that when people have great misfortunes, God will comfort them Himself, and that is best of all."

"You are speaking of great troubles, Cherry," said Margaret, "there are small ones that nobody pities one for, and there is nothing to comfort us in; what would you do then?"

"Yes, Margaret, they are the worst almost; because, for one thing, they are so often our own fault."

"That makes it no better," said Margaret.

"No, only one must bear them patiently, and try to do better next time, as mamma says."

"But it sounds so conceited," still argued Margaret, "so like making a mountain of a molehill, to talk about bearing little things. If it was having an arm cut off, or losing a friend, it would be different."

"I don't think it can be conceited," still answered Cherry, "because we look to see what part of it is our own fault, and we shall learn how often we are in the wrong, and as to making a mountain of a molehill, mamma says little things are important, because they come every day, and how we take them makes us more good or more bad, and great things only come sometimes."

"Cherry, Cherry, come," cried Frank's voice in the hall.

"There, they are ready, I must go, Margaret, dear."

"Just when we were having a nice talk," grumbled Margaret. "That is one proof of what I was saying. I could talk in this way to no one but you. What do you say to that, Cherry? Is that my own fault? Is that something to bear?"

"Oh, Margaret, how funny you are," said Cherry, standing with her hand in her friend's. "We always have what is best for us; so, if we have not the thing we wish for, I suppose we must put it out of our head."

But I think, Margaret, we have had a nice long piece of what we wanted now, have we not? and thank you, dear Margaret, for being so kind to me always." The tears were dimming Cherry's eyes. She could say no more, but kissing Margaret hastily, ran away to join her mother in the hall, who was waiting to see if she had wraps enough for the journey.

There was a great fuss and bustle for the next ten minutes, especially as Miss Swinton was amongst the departing guests. Luggage being brought down, carriage bags missing, warm shawls lent, good-byes all round, tears, messages to Wilfrid, and hopes of meeting again. All these made a scene of some confusion, and when the well-packed postchaise had driven off, and the hall-door was shut, and people began listlessly to return to their occupations, Mrs. Bruce sank back in the corner of her sofa, completely exhausted.

So weakened did she seem, and so little revived by some remedies brought by Matty, that Katharine proposed sending for Mr. Todd. This, however, her mother would not consent to. A little quiet was all she needed; Margaret might read to her; she would not join them at dinner, but hoped to be quite rested by the evening. It was pleasant for Margaret to have something to do for some one, to fill up the blank Cherry's departure left, and perhaps her mamma might have thought of that when she proposed the reading; at any rate it answered for both of them. At the end of the day Margaret felt less miserable than she expected, and Mrs. Bruce, although sufficiently shaken to make Katharine, who had more thought for her mother than she showed, a little uneasy, there was nothing at present to warrant sending for the doctor.

Every one rose the next morning with the feeling that something had been lost, and that the day looked

stupid before them. It was impossible not to miss Aunt Jane; in spite of her tiresome ways, as Matty called them, and her harsh judgments, which last were more in word than in reality, there was a continual vivacity about Miss Swinton's mind, a healthy energy, and a readiness to enter into everything which made her absence a great void in the family circle. Then dear Cherry was gone too, the point of union for them all, with her cheerful obliging manner, her straightforward ways, and her willingness to be either pet, playfellow, or companion. Cherry was a great loss, and the only comfort was that they could all join in regretting her, and in looking forward to the Midsummer holidays, when she and Frank might perhaps come to Eildon Manor again.

As to Margaret, it seemed to her that with the exception of that distant prospect, and the chance of Walter's coming home, there was nothing left to look at but a long vista of dull days, all like each other, of lessons with Miss Connor, then a long walk, then dinner, then a fight with Katharine perhaps, then lessons again, and sewing and reading aloud to finish with—for her own share, headaches, and Katharine always cross, Alice silly, and Miss Connor stiff and unsympathising. So grumbled silly inexperienced Margaret to herself as she sat practising her music. Little recked she that possibly long years afterwards, when like many another, immersed in the business of life, with every hour bringing some change, anxiety, or trial, she might look back with longing for those tranquil days, when, under the sheltering side of a loving mother, she could sit still and think.

Weeks passed away in this quiet fashion. Mrs. Bruce remained very delicate, and was obliged in the end to

call in Mr. Todd, who counselled quietness, and spoke of change of air when the season should be more advanced. Katharine meanwhile was occupied in drawing, working, and her usual little occupations, in yawning a good deal, and wishing that spring would come. Alice was sometimes very wild, and had battles-royal with her governess, in which she generally, with a slight show of resistance, came off in reality the victor, and sometimes, yielding to the promptings of her better nature, she would have what Wilfrid called a fit of goodness, would take to learning her lessons perfectly, and being obedient. As to Margaret, she spent only too much of her time in dreaming, was more than ever reproached for her absence of mind, was for ever forgetting things, and then feeling injured if reproved for what she thought she had not wilfully neglected. A headache generally followed this frame of mind, and then perhaps she would wish that she was more like Cherry, and with the thought of Cherry would come an effort to be more active and patient; and if failing, then discouraged again; and so on continually. It was a pity for Margaret that she could not have changed places for a month with the bright scullery-maid, who from the midst of her pans would rival the thrushes in her song, and whose sole trouble was when cook was cross, or when she had what she called 'the misfortune to break a plate or dish.

The first excitement that occurred in the now quiet household was a letter from Walter. It was the more welcome because a long interval had elapsed since the one in which he had thanked his mother for kind plans for him, and had announced that he had been favourably received by Miss Du Port. His silence had made Mrs. Bruce rather uncomfortable, but Katharine had declared her belief that he was coming home to sur-

prise them ; and so completely had this opinion gained currency in the house, that even little Minnie, if she saw a carriage of any sort, from a covered waggon to a donkey cart, coming up the road, would call out that Walter had come, and both the children had more than once startled their mamma by running in with this news to her. At last the letter from Walter came, and its contents surprised them almost as much as little Minnie's false alarms had done.

It was actually to tell his mother that he was married, and to hope that she would forgive his precipitancy as soon as she learnt the urgent reasons that led to it. It seemed that a few weeks ago the general had a fall from his horse when riding with his daughter and her accepted lover. The alarm they felt at first was allayed, when the injuries he had received were found to be apparently very slight. Whether his great age had rendered these dangerous, or whether he had been hurt internally had not appeared, but he was seized with paralysis, and after a week's helplessness had died. Happily, he retained his faculties to the end, and whilst he endeavoured with composure to meet the great change, his chief earthly anxiety was for his daughter, who would, after his death, be left in a city of strangers, with no near relative whom she could summon to her side. In this difficulty he yielded to Walter's entreaties that he would give him a legal right to be her protector, and Miss Du Port, more than anything wishing to ease her father's last moments, consented to it. Their hands were joined by an English clergyman whom they had always known, and as man and wife the general blessed them before he died. In giving these details, Walter wrote with an evident mixture of feelings. Private sorrow for the loss of a kind friend, sympathy with his wife's grief, and joy that he had the

sole right of comforting her, were all evident in his letter. He had written before the funeral, and could not therefore speak of the future, but promised very soon to write again, and begged for a letter from his mother to approve what he had done.

The news that Mr. Walter was married went through the house like a telegram, and nobody could think or talk of anything else. Matty wept, and so indeed did old Adams. To think that the young master who had lain in their arms a helpless baby, and whose gold coral was now amongst the plate in Adams's care, should be a grown man, and taking upon him the responsibilities of a husband, was almost past belief.

"Things did come about strangely in this world," said Matty, and she cried until little Minnie thought that something dreadful had happened, and she cried too, so then Matty was shocked at herself, repeated the old adage, that, "Blessed was the bride that the sun shone on," and declared that they should all be merry now Mr. Walter had got married, and finished off by telling Susan and the children, what they had certainly heard before, but what they were never tired of hearing, stories of what Walter did when he was a little boy.

The same in other parts of the house : everyone was talking about it, and every one seemed to think something ought to be done, but nobody proposed anything, until Alice, contemptuously tossing her Italian grammar on one side, declared that it would be the height of absurdity to do any lessons on Walter's wedding-day, or what was just the same, the day on which they heard of his wedding, and she ran off to her mother to ask if there ought not to be a holiday, and all sorts of things.

Mrs. Bruce, who was just sending off an express to Cudthorpe, willingly acceded the holiday, and the "all

sorts of things," gradually, after much consultation, settled down into a feast in the servants' hall, to which every one who had the excuse of being employed about the house was invited, and at which the schoolmaster from Sonny-sides presided, and Sir Thomas Gresley came over to address them in a hearty speech, promising them and all the tenantry another rejoicing on the day that Mr. Walter should bring home his bride.

As soon as the event became known beyond the house, the neighbours all began to drop in with their congratulations, and Katharine, whose rejoicing had been checked by a feeling of jealousy that any one should interfere with her right to Walter as his nearest sister, and once constant companion, now brightened up, as she foresaw that the new lady's arrival, with some unpleasantnesses, might bring them an accession of gaiety, for which she had often sighed.

Walter's next letter, eagerly expected, brought much disappointment. They had all been looking forward to the day being fixed for his return: instead of that, he said that his wife's health had been so much shaken by the shock she had received, that it was considered advisable that she should remain a little longer in the South before returning to England; and he had, therefore, made arrangements for a tour of two months in Italy and Switzerland; not before May did they hope to be at Eildon. Some business arrangements followed, in which, whilst Walter showed his usual affectionate consideration for his mother's opinion and pleasure, there was an occasional "we," and an allusion once or twice to Monica, the name so strange to them, so evidently now a part of him, that the mother's heart, spite of herself, felt for a moment a jealous pang, speedily put aside, however, in sympathy with her son's evident contentment.

Enclosed in Walter's, came a note from the young wife herself to Mrs. Bruce, in which she prettily expressed her gratitude for the kind messages that had been sent to her, and without making profession of an affection for her unknown relatives, which as yet she could scarcely be supposed to feel, spoke of the comfort it gave her to be able to look forward to the happiness of finding in their regard some recompense for all that she had lost. No sooner had this note been read by Mrs. Bruce than it was eagerly seized upon by all the girls. They devoured its contents, dwelt upon every line, questioned the sentiments, and disputed about all. "It was well," so Matty said, "that the bit letter was not Mrs. Walter herself, or she'd ha' been rived in pieces afore now."

The handwriting, clear and large, was pronounced masculine. "Evidently," Katharine said, "she was a tall, strong-minded woman;" her riding so much on horseback gave them an idea of a sort of Amazon. Alice took exception to the neatness of the whole. "She must be 'finniky,' and too particular for Eildon." Margaret was alone when she gave it as her opinion that she did not care much whether she was plain or not, but that she certainly had a beautiful name.

"Beautiful!" her sisters exclaimed at that. "Bruce was good, of course; but 'Monica,'—she might as well be called 'Bridget'—it was nothing in the world but an old saint's name. But, perhaps, that was natural enough, seeing that she came from Rome," continued these flippant young ladies, so ignorant as they were of the real beauty of the epithet they used; and somehow or other the idea became confirmed amongst them that this Monica would be a saint, each still picturing her as they liked best; Katharine adhering to the large-boned, strong-minded woman; Alice giving her better-

looks and smaller bones, but making her methodistical and particular, not allowing "a bit of fun ;" and Margaret fancying her like a Madonna that she had once seen in a house in Maskham, with golden hair, pure heavenly expression, and, perhaps—who knew?—just the friend that she was longing for, some one to whom she could look up, who would help her, understand her, and, perhaps, even make her happy. Her fancies Margaret took good care not to confide to her sisters.

CHAPTER XI.

Tedious is this day
As is the night before some festival
To an impatient child, that hath new robes
And may not wear them.—SHAKESPEAR.

THE excitement of a new event, however important, does not last for ever; time sobers joy as well as soothes sorrow; and in a few weeks, although they still often talked about Walter and his wife, and particularly when a letter came from them with a graphic and picturesque account, in which female touches were often visible, of the places that they were visiting, still the subject was no longer the engrossing one, and everybody had sunk back again into the daily routine of life. This had, however, become by degrees brighter and more lively, for the days were longer, spring had come with all its reviving pleasures; the weekly drives to Maskham had begun again, and with them, of course, a weekly visit to the Hawkins's, for no one would have thought of leaving the town without a sight of Cherry. Margaret had not often an opportunity of being with her friend alone, but a peep at her was enlivening, and many times Margaret brought some good and useful thought away.

The long talked-of visit to Cudthorpe had never yet been paid, and, as Margaret's headaches had become less frequent, no more was said about it, until one day when Miss Lavinia, in what the children called her state-coach, came over to call upon Mrs. Bruce, and, complaining of Margaret's pale cheeks, insisted upon taking her back with her for a week.

Margaret swallowed some tears by the way, but, once there, she almost enjoyed herself. Elinor was so devoted to her, so enchanted to see her arrive; and, although Elinor was immeasurably inferior to Cherry, indeed, quite a silly girl; there was something pleasant in being looked up to, and famously Margaret took advantage of it. She patronised both the children, directed all their amusements, and, when alone with them, astonished their simplicity by the lofty and rather mysterious strain in which she talked to them.

By Miss Lavinia, too, Margaret was treated with as much indulgence as she could possibly show to any young person, for Margaret was thoughtful and polite when out visiting, quiet, and always wiped her boots on the mat, and shut her drawers quite close, besides being a delightful and pretty docile subject for any amount of strengthening draughts and decoctions out of the old Gresley recipe book.

Margaret might therefore be said to be set upon a pinnacle by Miss Gresley and the girls; and no pains were spared by Sir Thomas to add his share to the process of spoiling. He had her equipped and mounted the day after she arrived at Cudthorpe, and then took her out for long rides with him every day; and when he met her about the house he never failed to pat her head as he might his greyhound's, and say something pleasant and encouraging. In return she used to play and sing her best every evening after dinner, whilst Sir Thomas sat in a half-doze of enjoyment. Nothing else would he allow; for if Miss Lavinia attempted, in his presence, to introduce either knitting or sewing, or moral maxims, he would stop her at once, and cry, "Holidays these, Miss Lavinia. She may surely lie fallow for one may she not?"

is was pleasant enough to Margaret, and though

apparently "lying fallow," her time was not wasted. She was attracted by Miss Lavinia's active, useful life, and braced up by her sensible, unromantic observations; and when, after her last ride upon the black pony with Sir Thomas, she dismounted at her own home, they were all surprised to see her look so fresh and blooming.

There was news for her at home. The travellers had begun to turn their steps in the right direction, and in less than three weeks they might be looked for at Eildon. It had been decided by the heads of the house that a general cleaning must be the first step towards their reception, and paperers and plasterers had already been summoned from Maskham, and the house was fairly beginning to be turned out of the windows. A fortnight of confusion followed, everything in a state of discomfort, and the family hunted from room to room, by the remorseless cleaners. Minnie and Tom delighted in the laxity of the time; and, perhaps, so great is the charm of novelty, their sisters somewhat shared the feeling; but none were sorry when the heavy part of the work was done, and only the pleasant task of arranging and adorning the rooms destined for the new-comers, was left to their taste and ingenuity.

The large bedroom and dressing-room over the drawing-room, with windows looking over to Cudthorpe, and the fine ridge of hills above, were chosen for Walter and his wife; and for the latter, specially, Mrs. Bruce devoted a little room not far from them, and tasked all the shops in Maskham to furnish it completely.

The girls stood in admiration when it was all finished, and Matty acknowledged that it was "a bonny show."

The room was lighted by an old-fashioned long window, with a seat in it covered with crimson velvet, the same as the couch and easy chairs, to be afterwards covered with a gay chintz of roses and ferns, upon a

white ground. On the mantelpiece, which was canopied by the same crimson velvet, stood some Parian figures, reflected by the large mirror behind them. A single picture adorned the walls—that of Walter as a precocious and handsome boy of six years old, in hat and feathers, about to mount his pony. Some pretty bookshelves held a few choice volumes, but large spaces were left for the lady's own. The tables, also, would have been left vacant had they not been recently occupied by little offerings from each of the family, including some pretty mats of Miss Connor's work. A small console-table, opposite the fireplace, held another present, a magnificent set of Dresden china, from Miss Gresley, exceeding in value, from their unique fashion, the well-trained horse that Sir Thomas had already placed in the Eildon stable as his gift to Walter's wife. The last adornment was a vase of choice exotics picked up somewhere by the gardener, and a stand of fragrant hyacinths, whose odour might have been overpowering, had not the window near which they stood been thrown so widely open as to furnish an abundant entrance to the grateful breeze.

"I am sure that I shall not sleep a wink to-night," said Alice, when they had finished every little arrangement to their perfect satisfaction, "so I shall come and waken you all at five o'clock in the morning, Meg."

"You silly children," said Katharine, "don't you see how much longer you will make the day by getting up so early? and there is nothing to do to-morrow."

"Oh, Katharine! there are fifty things to do," said Alice; "and we want to decorate the servants' hall, and we do not know what time they will come. I only wish that Wilfrid had been here. I think it is a shame not to let him come home at such a time."

This was a grievance that was often referred to by

Alice. Wilfrid's coming home to meet his brother had been suggested, but laid aside again ; and it had been settled instead that he should meet Walter in Maskham, and spend half an hour there with them, much to Alice's disappointment ; and she now did not cease grumbling about it in a half-angry, half-whimsical way, until she went to bed.

"I am dreadfully tired," yawned Katharine, as they went along the gallery together. "Now, Alice, pray do not be racketing about at an unearthly hour in the morning."

"Not if I can sleep, I promise you," said Alice, as they separated.

But she could not sleep, the sun awakened her ; so, fully absolved from her promise, she got up before five o'clock, and not only wakened Margaret but the little ones, and with them, of course, the rest of the sleepers near ; for a riotous game in their little beds, carried on with shouts and laughter by Tom and Minnie, allowed no more sleep to any one within hearing.

As soon as they were dressed, Alice and Margaret, without waiting for any one else, descended to the garden. How charming it was on this beautiful May morning ! The broad sloping lawn, smooth and green under its sparkling coat of dew, the flower-beds gay with every variety of opening flowers, the elm trees just bursting into leaf, and the pine plantations clothed with their first tender green, and giving out delicious odours. On the opposite hills the various tints were dimly seen through a white haze that filled the valley ; but every moment the powerful sun was making some impression upon the mist, whilst its beams were greeted by the song of fifty thrushes.

"Now, what shall we do ?" said Alice, whilst Margaret was drinking in the refreshing influence of the

beauty round her. "Suppose we go and see the cows milked."

"They have not come in yet," objected Margaret, who did not care for cows.

"Then let us go and get a lot of flowers, and ivy, and pine branches, and things to decorate with."

This proposal was better received, so Alice ran back into the house for a knife and a large basket, and then dragged Margaret at a rapid pace down the carriage-road to the lodge. Here a difficulty presented itself—the gates were locked, the blinds of the lodge were down, evidently no one there was up. "What a shame!" cried the girls, with the indignation always felt by those who have got up, against those who are still in bed, however early it may be. "I shall waken them pretty soon, I guess," said Alice, taking up a stone with the intention of battering the door with it.

"Oh, don't, Alice," said Margaret; "you will frighten poor old Betty out of her wits; let us go back again."

"Not I," answered Alice. "Here, Betty, holloa, Pearson," and, as she called, she beat upon the window-shutters with her stone, heedless of the poor polyanthus that she was murdering with her feet.

Presently some bolts were withdrawn, the door was moved, and an old visage under a red worsted nightcap appeared through a small opening, and a thick, angry voice cried out, "What are you about there, makking sike a skindy? Oh! Miss Margaret, I ax your pardon, mum; but the clatter half deaved Betty; her rheumatics is so bad."

"Let me come, father," cried a lusty voice from behind, "if it's that young William again on with any of his tricks, I'll break every bone in his body."

"Whisht, lad," said the face under the red nightcap, turning round, "it's the ladies from the House."

The voice retreated, grumbling something, only half-distinct, about it's not being much of ladies to be making a noise like that so early in the morning ; whilst Alice said frankly,

"I am sorry, Pearson, that we have disturbed Betty, but you see Mr. Walter is coming home, so we got up early, and we want the gates open, please."

"Mr. Walter coming now?" cried the old man, and he would have rushed out as he was, perhaps, had not Alice stopped him, by adding, "No, not till evening ; but we are going to Dickey's Wood for flowers."

"All right, mum," said the old man, and the head and nightcap were withdrawn.

"What a rage they were in," said Margaret.

"Yes, especially the young one," answered Alice. "It was great fun. I shall tell Wilfrid all about it when he comes home."

"But I wish they would make haste," said Margaret, tapping the gravel impatiently with her feet ; "I am tired already. I don't think I like getting up so early."

At this moment young Pearson appeared, and touching his cap, opened the gates, and enabled them at last to proceed on their expedition.

Thanks to Alice's exertions, all the rest of the Eildon people had got up very early, and were ready for breakfast long before the usual hour ; even Mrs. Bruce, whose ill-health made her rarely able to appear before eleven o'clock, was roused by little Tom's announcement at her door that Walter was coming, and she was amongst them long before Alice and Margaret had come back.

Their long absence caused some uneasiness, and Miss Connor put on her bonnet to look for them, and had got as far as the lodge when she met them, fresh and blooming as the flowers they carried, and not only loaded themselves with branches of young pine, gar-

lands of ivy, and heaps of moss, but accompanied by a boy that they had captured on his way to school, and induced by the bribe of twopence to help them with their load instead.

To do them justice, tired and hungry as they were, they were more anxious about Billy's breakfast than their own, and had him well fed before they sent him away with his twopence, and, by Miss Connor's desire, also with a note to the schoolmaster explaining the reason of his truancy. Then they devoted themselves to the making of wreaths, festoons, and decorations of different sorts, not only for the servants' hall, but for every available place in the house, even to the nursery, where a huge "Welcome" was to salute Master Walter the moment he entered it. Katharine helped them until she was tired, and then Miss Connor good-naturedly took her place, and in the midst Sir Thomas Gresley walked in to see how they were going on, and laughed, and teased, and admired, and allowed himself to be dragged up and down without a struggle. No entreaties, however, would make him stay till the evening, he only promised to come to-morrow, and then, after giving Tommy a ride down the road upon his black horse, he rode away himself.

The travellers were not expected until late in the afternoon, but long before that time the young ladies had been driven out of the servants' hall at the instance of cook and her myrmidons, and then out of their refuge, the schoolroom, by a fidgety housemaid, who must, if they pleased, clear all the rubbish away before the afternoon, and finally they found themselves, after luncheon, with two or three long hours on their hands and nothing to employ them.

Margaret's head had begun to ache very much by this time, whilst Alice was in exuberant and mis-

chievous spirits, and Miss Connor, setting them an example by tranquilly sitting down to write a letter, advised them to occupy themselves quietly with a book or work, that they might be refreshed for the evening.

"Such a humdrum idea, so like her," said Alice aside to Margaret; and then she proposed that they should run up to the highest staircase window that they might see the point from which the travellers' carriage would be first visible.

Such an ascent was beyond Margaret, who was at this time standing in rather a disconsolate attitude watching her canary peck its grains of food, so Alice next proposed to run down to the lodge to see the grand triumphal arch, which every one said was to be beautiful. No, Margaret could not do that either, so Alice had to go off in search of other playmates. These she unexpectedly found in the shape of her little brother and Minnie, who happened to have been left for a few minutes by themselves in the nursery, and who closed with Alice's proposal immediately.

Like to see the beautiful arch? Of course they would. Every thing connected with the unknown Walter filled them with delight. How they expected him to appear was not quite clear, but Katharine thought they looked for something between Jack the Giant-killer and Alfred the Great, for Tom had asked if Walter would have a crown on like the king in his picture history-book, and Minnie was overheard telling her doll that a giant was coming who would take her away if she was naughty. However that might be, they were full of glee at the idea of going out with Alice. Their drawers were pulled open, jackets, hats, and gloves dragged out promiscuously, hastily put on by Alice, with little regard for the right side foremost, the

articles not needed left upon the floor, and the children quickly led by her downstairs into the pleasant fresh air.

She trotted the young things down to the lodge in a wonderfully short space of time, and, arrived there, they found themselves in a most busy scene. It was just the moment of the raising of the arch; all the cottagers near were assembled, with Adams and the gardener as chief directors, and many others in their best attire quickly gathered from different directions. Alice drew the children on one side whilst the finishing strokes were being added; then, when a shout of triumph announced that it was done, she followed the crowd into the road beyond, from whence they could see the erection to the best advantage.

The arch was very well done, of great height, made of fine evergreens, with openings here and there, in the form of tracery, and clusters of bright flowers at every interlacing of the pattern; over all, in open letters, with the light shining through, was the word WELCOME, crowned by the united initials of Walter and his bride.

The crowning piece of ingenuity was eagerly pointed out to Alice by one of the men who stood around. It was so contrived that in case of their not arriving until dark, a lamp behind the letters could be lighted, and the "welcome" would be clearly illuminated. It was more than probable that the gardener hoped that the arrival might be delayed, for he evidently thought the lighting contrivance the best part of the design.

The people were pleased to see Alice, whose easy manners made her a favourite amongst them, and many were the blessings murmured on the little ones, mingled with expressions of their gladness that the young squire was coming home to tread in the steps of his father—"a fine man he was." Alice, who liked nothing better than popularity, was in her element; she

joked and laughed with them, until even half-deaf old Adams was attracted, and, partly with a view of withdrawing her from the crowd, he said, "Will you not come and see how neatly it is finished in the inside, Miss Alice?"

She complied, and had just entered the grounds, when a cry was raised in the road, "They are coming, there's a coach and four dashing up the road!"

"Tom," cried Alice, almost choked with excitement, to the little boy who was at some distance from her, "take hold of Minnie's hand, and bring her safely home; I must go and tell mamma;" and then without waiting another moment she began to run swiftly up the road, nearly knocking against old Adams, who had begun to walk back to the house directly after he had seen her turn away from the crowd. "They are coming, Adams, we are all caught," she shouted, as she passed, and continued to rush towards the house, into which she dashed with the same startling cry.

She soon collected most of the inhabitants, who came forward with more dismay than pleasure on their countenances, whilst Alice breathlessly imparted all she knew, and then everybody began to think anxiously about the dinner, the rooms and arrangements, or their own dress, as the case might be. Mrs. Bruce, pale and trembling, and Matty, arrived last on the scene of action.

"Mr. Walter coming already?" exclaimed the latter, as soon as she understood; "but where's the children, Miss Alice?"

"Coming up the road," said Alice. "It's all right, Matty, Adams will take care of them, I dare say."

"And a carriage and horses on their backs, poor little darlings," said Matty, with a withering glance. "You're no more nor a child yourself, Miss Alice," and, without waiting to put on her bonnet, the faithful

nurse hastened out of the house to seek her missing charge.

Mrs. Bruce only waited to give some hurried orders to the servants, and then went to the drawing-room window to look out for the arrival, whilst Katharine and Margaret, for the same purpose, went out into the garden, and left Alice impatiently listening to Miss Connor's reproofs of her carelessness. The suspense of a few minutes was suddenly ended by the appearance of young Pearson, who was seen running towards the house as fast as he was able. When he saw the young ladies he stopped and touched his cap. "It's nought but nonsense, mum. It was nobbit auld Job Spencer's gig coming from Maskham market, and that little rascal of Peacock's set up t'cry for fun, but his father's given him a good hiding for't, he has."

Nothing but nonsense ! Here was a provoking end to all the fuss. Katharine and Margaret went back to the house much more slowly than they had come out of it, and began to scold Alice for being the messenger of such a false alarm, and Matty arriving in the midst, with Minnie in her arms, crying about a bruise upon her knee, of which certainly both she and Matty made the very most, Alice was covered with universal reproaches, and dismissed by Miss Connor, in a more authoritative tone than she often assumed, to her own room, to dress and keep out of further mischief.

People's movements had been so much hastened by the false alarm, that in the end all the preparations were quite finished, and everybody assembled in state in the drawing-room nearly an hour before the time at which Walter had said it was possible they could arrive. The consequence was that they all got dreadfully tired of waiting ; fidgety, yawny, and cross. The children taken away to their tea made a little diversion,



Arrival of Walter and his bride.

but they had some luck getting the twilight was fast — — — coming on, and were had to go out for the sixth time to make a check on the clock. He repeatedly said, "I declare that is nearly seven o'clock," and they went out and fastened their bags.

Since each near- $\mathcal{C}$ - $\mathcal{C}$ is effectively a $\mathcal{C}$ - $\mathcal{C}$, we can find a long $\mathcal{C}$ - $\mathcal{C}$ by taking the union of a distinct $\mathcal{C}$ - $\mathcal{C}$ in each $\mathcal{C}$ - $\mathcal{C}$ bounded by $\mathcal{C}$. This is the $\mathcal{C}$ - $\mathcal{C}$ we need.

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My dear Sir,
In reply to your letter of the 11th inst. I beg to say that I have no objection, and I am sure the Committee will have no objection, to your making such use of the facts and figures furnished to you as you may think proper.

4. The defendant is not a member of the Communist Party of the United States of America, nor is he a member of any other organization which advocates the overthrow of the Government of the United States by force or violence.

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A. Walter and his wife.

P. 101.

but they had come back again ; the twilight was fast coming on, the fire had been stirred for at least the sixth time to make a cheerful blaze, and Alice had repeatedly said, "I declare they are not coming, it is nearly seven o'clock," when a hum of voices in the distance made their hearts beat as they listened.

Soon it came nearer, shouts and cheers could be distinctly heard, then came the roll of wheels, the trampling of feet upon the gravel, and, after a few moments of indistinct confusion, Mrs. Bruce was found standing in the hall with all her children round her, the servants behind, Adams at the entrance, and a carriage drawn by men instead of horses, just stopping before the door.

Mrs. Bruce advanced, the little ones grew shy, and ran to Matty, probably thinking of Jack the Giant-killer, whose tall, manly form now stepped into the hall, leading a graceful figure in mourning.

"My dear mother," in the deep tones of earnest affection, was all that Walter said, as he threw his arms round her, then, himself lifting up the black veil that covered his wife, he added, "and Monica, mother, here she is."

A momentary glance of a fair sweet face was all that any one could catch in the rapid greetings that followed. Adams, Matty, none were forgotten, until at last, through a passage of old friends, Walter found himself in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Bruce here led her daughter-in-law to the sofa, and placed her near to herself, where the fire-light fell brightly upon her face. Whilst Katharine and Alice were hanging about Walter, and pouring out questions and news, Margaret crept round the sofa to her usual place by her mother's side, where she could see without being observed.

Yes, there was the face like, and yet unlike, her dream; there was the exquisite form and features, rivalling the painter's conception of the most wonderful of women, a clear complexion, smooth dark hair, almond-shaped eyes, black in intensity, blue in clearness, softened by their long shadowy lashes, a sweet mouth, and over all the pure thoughtful expression, the happiness that is not like the pretty joyousness of childhood, but that which comes when one has passed the stormy waves, and found a friendly shore. Margaret was fascinated, and her eyes rested with intense interest on Monica, as with a sweet modesty, but evident desire to please, she replied to Mrs. Bruce's questions about their journey.

"What, little mouse, are you there, in your old corner?" said Walter, turning round, and quickly remarking Margaret; "I suppose my mother could not do without you beside her."

Margaret smiled, but Walter now, for the first time, caught sight of his mother's altered face, and without another word he sat down close to his wife, took the shy, solemn children, who had by this time ventured to approach him, one on each knee, and with an earnest sadness, which had already cast a bitter drop into his cup of pleasure, continued to regard her.

All at once the door opened, and as if he had only been absent for a few minutes, and with a face full of suppressed amusement, Wilfrid lounged into the room. A soft joyous laugh from Monica proclaimed that the jest was not unknown to her, but was drowned in the loud exclamations of surprise and the delighted questions that were immediately poured upon Wilfrid, as he was surrounded and embraced by all.

"It was his own suggestion, but I am to take the blame," exclaimed Walter.

"It is all right, mamma," added Wilfrid. "Mr.

Hawkins said, 'Certainly, if Mr. Bruce wishes it,' and I am to be shipped off again in Aunt Swinton's carriage to-morrow."

"An excellent plan," quoth Alice, recovering at once from the sort of shy stiffness that was just beginning to creep over them all, when Wilfrid's welcome entrance afforded a diversion.

Presently Mrs. Bruce proposed that the travellers should be shown to their rooms; "Katharine must be my deputy," she said, "and I will rest till you return." Katharine rose somewhat reluctantly; but Alice, jumping up, said, "We can all go, come, Meg."

"Since you are so well attended, Monica," said her husband, "I will stay with my mother for ten minutes." Monica smiled acquiescence, and followed Katharine and her sisters out of the room.

"Must we show her every place as we go along?" said Alice, who had rapidly recovered her spirits, and having seen no signs of large bones, strong-mindedness, or over-precision as yet, had also lost her fears, and seemed resolved to take the lead boldly. "This is the dining-room," she said, half-opening the door, to the great annoyance of Adams, who was at that moment busy at the side-board; "that is the library, where Cherry lay for three weeks after she had broken her leg—Walter would tell you about it; and here,—Oh, stop, Katharine," she added, seeing that her sister was turning towards the staircase, "we must show her the schoolroom."

"But Miss Connor will be there."

"Never mind, we shall startle her. It will be fun," said Alice, heedlessly.

"I can go there another time, can I not?" said Monica, gently, but it was no use; by that time Alice had thrown open both doors, and called out in loud

imitation of the servants, "Mrs. Walter Bruce, mum." Miss Connor, who had been sitting beside the fire reading, with a small lamp placed near to her, was as much startled as Alice could have wished. The warm colour rushed to her pale cheeks, as she rather hastily rose and bowed.

"Our governess," whispered Margaret.

Monica had been for a moment a little embarrassed, but the next she went forward, and sweetly apologized for her intrusion. "My sisters, I suppose," she said, "were anxious to bring me here at once. I hope I may be allowed to come here again; but, at present," she added, turning to Katharine, "had we not better go upstairs? Your mamma warned me not to be long in dressing."

"Does she fancy that I too am in the schoolroom?" said Katharine to herself, a little annoyed at being classed with the others as "my sisters," and there was an increase of dignity in her manner, as she agreed with Monica, and led the way upstairs.

"Mamma's room, and Margaret's, Aunt Jane's when she is here," said Alice, still intent upon playing the showman, "and Katharine's and mine. Now the nursery. Oh, come, you must just see the nursery; would you not like just to have a peep?—besides, there is something for you to see."

Monica could not refuse, so they went along the gallery to the end where Matty's kingdom was situated, and the door being thrown wide open, the "Welcome" was fully conspicuous. "Thank you," said Monica, gratefully; and then she went a little further into the room after Alice to examine it. Here Master Tom and Minnie were already sitting on high chairs before their basins of bread and milk, having been captured by Susan a few minutes before.

"Alice, you had better not disturb them," said Katharine, "there will be no peace if you do."

"We will not go in now, then," said Monica, retreating directly, after nodding to the children, and shutting the door herself.

"What nonsense, Kate," said Alice, "we might just as well have gone in. However, now come along to the other corridor,—that is where your dens are."

"Pray, do not be so rude, Alice," said Katharine, with a shocked air. Surely Monica would now see the difference, as, stepping before Alice, she herself led the way to the rooms prepared for the travellers.

Here they found Matty in possession, busily employed in directing the movements of Mrs. Walter Bruce's maid, a nice-looking, respectable young woman, who was unpacking one of the trunks.

As soon as she saw the ladies, Matty dropped her old-fashioned curtsey, and stood aside.

"Our nurse, Matty," said Katharine, by way of introduction.

Monica at once took her by the hand. "I know your name, Matty, very well," she said; "my husband has often spoken of you to me. How do you think Mr. Bruce is looking?"

"Uncommonly well, ma'am," replied Matty, curtsying again, and colouring with pleasure. "Master Walter was nobbit a slim youth when he left Eildon, and he's returned to it a man, and though I say it as mebbe suddent, seeing I have a part and parcel in him, as one may say, being his old nurse, ma'am, as fine a man as you'd see anywhere, and I hope, ma'am, as good a one."

"Indeed he is," said young Mrs. Bruce, gratified in her turn by the warm affection which the good nurse's tearful eyes and earnest manner plainly showed, and

Matty, with the corner of her apron up, quietly went away.

"What a pretty room," said Monica, casting her eyes round upon the careful arrangements for her comfort. "I am sure I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for me."

"We had better go now," said Katharine, after rather an awkward little pause, for she did not know what else to say; and as Monica only smiled, and said she should not be long in dressing, Katharine and her sisters somehow rather shyly got themselves out of the room, not before they had heard Monica address her neat maid by the quaint name of Patience.

"How odd everything is about her," said Alice, throwing herself down in the corner of the deeply-recessed seat of the staircase window. "You see even her maid can't be called by a common name. I rather like it, though, myself. What do you say, Katharine?"

"I think she is sly," said Katharine, with decision.

Both her sisters exclaimed against this, and Alice totally disagreed. "I don't," she said, "and though I think she is going to be rather priggish, I think her decidedly handsome."

"She is not ugly," said Katharine, "that is one comfort. It would have been horrid to have had a plain woman to take about; but her complexion is queer, and I never should have thought that Walter would have chosen that style."

"I think she is beautiful," said Margaret, speaking almost below her breath.

Both her sisters laughed. "I knew Meg would do it," cried Alice. "Did I not prophesy, Kate, that she would go into raptures with her the first night?"

"Well," cried Margaret, in a passion, "I think it is

a great shame of you to speak against Walter's wife, before you—"

"Who is speaking of Walter's wife?" said a manly voice on the staircase. "What, Mousey, is it you?"

The sisters were overwhelmed with confusion as their brother appeared before them, and it was fortunate for them that the dim light of the deep recess in which they sat partially concealed their faces from him, or he might have read in them a confirmation of his partly-formed suspicions.

"Oh, Walter, how you startled us!" said Alice, emerging from the window, always the bravest of the three.

"I am sorry for it; but you must have been talking very earnestly, or my seven-league boots would surely have given you notice of the ogre's approach. Remember, sisters mine, that I shall eat you all up if you are not very kind to my poor fatherless Monica."

There was deep feeling mingled with the jest of Walter's speech, and as he strode along in the heavy boots that almost deserved the dignity he bestowed upon them, the girls whispered to each other, "He must have heard," and the shock certainly sobered them so much, that they were glad to go quietly downstairs, and for that night, at least, attempted no more criticisms upon the sister-in-law.

Indeed, there was not much opportunity, for first came the dinner, which, being in state, seemed long, and directly afterwards, Walter was required in the servant's hall, where there was a large gathering of tenantry and humble friends. To them, also, Monica was introduced, and then led back again to the drawing-room, where she remained quietly conversing with Mrs. Bruce, whilst Walter addressed his people, and did what Alice called the popularity dodge. Before long, he rejoined

them in the drawing-room, but he was soon attracted by the evidently painful effort which it required to enable Monica to bear up, even in quiet conversation ; and, knowing how much fatigue she had lately borne, he tenderly insisted upon her retiring to rest, and this being the signal for a general dispersing, in a most commonplace and quiet way was ended a long and, to the Eildon family, a most eventful day.

CHAPTER XII.

The valleys, hills, and woods in rich array,
Welcome the coming of the longed-for May :
Now all things smile.—CAREW.

THERE was almost as much curiosity to see the new sister the next morning, as there had been the day before ; for, as Alice said, " People look so different by candle-light, that perhaps she might turn out old and ugly now." In was, therefore no small disappointment when no Monica appeared at breakfast, only Walter with an apology for her ; by his request she had remained in bed to rest after her journey. Mrs. Bruce was not able either to come down, so Katharine had, as she had often lately done, to preside at the breakfast table, only with the new and pleasant addition of a brother on each side of her.

Katharine was much elated altogether ; her Aunt and Uncle Swinton would arrive to-day ; there would be a dinner-party in the evening ; for the first time a real distinction would be drawn between her and her school-room sisters, Monica would see her in her right position, and the only drawback would be the presence of her cousin Georgina, for whom Katharine had certainly entertained for the last five years, ever since some childish quarrel when Katharine was staying at Oakington, a decided aversion.

This prospect, however, did not prevent her from entering into the fun that was going on all round the table ; Wilfrid was in high spirits ; Walter might also have been a school-boy enjoying an unexpected holiday, and the girls were not far behind. There had not been

so merry a breakfast at Eildon for many a day, and it certainly was a damper when, after the meal had been prolonged to an unusual length, Miss Connor rose and desired the girls to accompany her to the schoolroom.

"Oh, Miss Connor," cried Alice, "you surely do not mean it. Now, Walter, you shall be the judge, is it likely that we can say any lessons this morning?"

"I cannot tell," said Walter, quietly, "not knowing if you have learned any."

"Oh, Walter! please don't be absurd," continued Alice. "This is really earnest; ought we not to have holiday to-day?"

"I should think that entirely depends upon Miss Connor," looking towards that lady, who was standing near the door, rather nervously listening to Alice's remonstrances.

"I did not intend to make any change to-day in our usual arrangements," said she.

"It is ridiculous, Alice," put in Katharine, rather impatiently. "You are so babyish, always wishing for a holiday."

Alice was looking first at Wilfrid, then at the sunshine, then at Walter, pitifully, and seemed about to break forth indignantly, when the latter stopped her by saying, "When I was at school, we always expected an old pupil to beg us a holiday, and, as I certainly may call myself an old pupil here, may I, in my wife's name and my own, ask you to excuse these idle girls from all their studies to-day?"

"Certainly," said Miss Connor; "if Mrs. Bruce has no objection."

"I will undertake that part of it," said Walter; "and also, if possible, to keep them out of mischief."

Miss Connor smiled, as was expected, looked rather unhappily at Alice, and left the room.

"Thank you, Walter, that is a comfort," said Margaret, coming round and laying her hand upon his arm.

"Thanks, thanks," cried Alice, seizing Minnie, who was also in the room, and whirling her round and round. "I think I should have gone distracted to have sat still in the schoolroom this morning, whilst you and Wilfrid were going about at liberty; listening to Miss Connor, who is just like a pendulum, backwards and forwards, always in the same dull line."

"If you quiz Miss Connor, Alice," said Walter, "you will get no more holidays out of me."

Here a knock at the door and a summons for Master Tom and Miss Minnie to go out walking directly caused some confusion, for those two small individuals declined *in toto* to obey, and could only be removed by Wilfrid hoisting Master Tom upon his shoulders, and so carrying him off to the nursery.

"I am going to gather flowers for the drawing-room, Meg," said Katharine, when, the others following Wilfrid, these two were left alone; "you may come with me if you like."

Margaret always liked everything about flowers, so she got her hat, and went with her sister into the garden, where the breath of coming summer saluted them deliciously. Here, after a while, Walter joined them.

"Well, Mousey," he said to Margaret, "what are you going to do this morning?"

"I don't know, Walter," she replied; "I have not seen Alice since breakfast." Alice always proposed the movements; it was only Margaret's part to object or agree to them as she felt inclined.

"What do you say to a long walk before Wilfrid goes away? I should like to show Monica some of the pretty woods I have so often told her about." Margaret

exclaimed, "Oh! that will be very nice; I will go and tell Alice," and she ran off, whilst Walter continued, "What do you say, Katy?"

In a doubtful way, she replied, "There is so much to do to-day, Walter, you see—the Swintons coming this afternoon."

"Oh! never mind the Swintons," said Walter, with a man's happy obliviousness of the many little necessities in expectation of a guest. "They cannot find anything to complain of, I am sure. Everything is so nice, thanks to you all. Monica is delighted."

"Always Monica," grumbled Katharine to herself; but she was too well pleased at having Walter all to herself, even for a short time, to stop to quarrel with his words, and more amiably she answered, "Well, if mamma does not want me particularly this morning, I will go. Look, Walter, how this rose-tree has grown. I think it has spread a yard for every year that you have been away."

Walter looked at the creeping noisette that was spreading over the front of the house, and wondered and admired; and from the rose-tree they began to talk of other things that belonged to the times before he went away, and Katharine was talking more confidently to him than she had done to any one for years, when they were interrupted by a light tap on the drawing-room window, near which they were walking up and down. They looked up and saw Monica nodding to them. She disappeared directly, and in another minute had joined them in the garden.

Annoyed as Katharine was at the interruption, she could not withstand the winning smile, or do aught but return the kindly greeting.

"You forget, my dear," said Walter, pointing to the uncovered head, and speaking with the assumption of

husband-like authority, which had so amused his sisters the night before, "you forget that this mountain air is very different from what you have been accustomed to in Italy."

"Different and delightful," said Monica, inhaling a long, deep breath of it. "There is a freshness here that seems to give new life to me. Still, perhaps, as you say, Walter, it will be wise to get my hat and shawl," and she turned round to go back to the house, when she descried her maid coming towards her with the things she needed. "Ah! here is my good Patience. Thank you, Patience, I am glad you thought of it."

"Mrs. Bruce sent me, ma'am," replied the maid.

"Kind mother, to remember me," said Monica, looking at Walter with a sort of grateful smile.

At this moment Wilfrid and Alice appeared, with the eager question, "Where are we to go to, Walter? Shall it be the Beck and Throstle-gill?"

Walter easily agreed, and told Monica about the walk. She was quite ready to join; and they all went into the house, to tell Mrs. Bruce, and to arrange for it. Katharine again began to fancy she could not go; but they would not hear of any one staying behind. "Might Patience arrange the flowers?" Monica asked. "The girl has quite a taste in such matters." But a little cloud on Katharine's face made her, with ready tact, add, "Or will you let her put them in water for the present, if you prefer, as I do, to arrange the lovely things yourself?"

Katharine thanked her; but, no, she would put the flowers in a large basin for the present herself: she would not detain them for more than two or three minutes.

"We must help her, then," said Alice, aside to the others, "or she will fid-fad over them for an hour."

So, after speaking to Mrs. Bruce, they all followed Katharine to the library, where, certainly, they did not offer any more valuable assistance than laughing and looking on.

"Pretty creatures," said Monica, bending over the roses, as Katharine, with Margaret, left the room to get their walking-dress on.

"Katharine," said Margaret, as they came downstairs again past the large staircase-window, "do look at that white fleecy cloud. How beautiful it looks against the deep blue sky!"

"Faugh!" said Katharine, with a face of disgust. "Pray, Meg, don't take to the sentimental; one in a family is enough."

Margaret saw that Katharine was what they called "put out;" but as that was not an unusual circumstance, she made no remark, but followed her downstairs.

Throstle-gill was to be their destination; and as Alice had given a glowing description of the wild-flowers its woods contained, Wilfrid had been furnished by his mother with a basket for Monica to gather them in. The dogs were then whistled up, and, thus prepared, they all set off together; Wilfrid and Alice, in high glee, often roaming off from the direct road, but coming back again, that Alice might fulfil her self-elected office of cicerone to Monica.

This was the pine planted on the day that Walter was born—now you could see the spire of Maskham church—that was the gardener's house, this the lodge. Then came poor Burton's house, and with that the whole story, at which Wilfrid blushed and Margaret grew chill. That story lasted until they came to the place where Cherry Hawkins broke her leg; and here they turned down into a plantation. This plantation

ran along the side of a large pasture that sloped down to the Beck, and through it gurgled a tiny stream, by the side of which the rough path ran.

Monica was not clever in stepping over the felled trunk of a branchy pine, or in making her way through brushwoods; but the laughing that Walter led against her awkwardness was heartily joined in by herself. At last they had scrambled down to the Beck, and here Throstle-gill began; and the sweet, luxuriant warbling of the thrushes fully justified the name that the people had given to this part of the valley. At this season, the Beck itself was nearly dry, and it was easy to walk along its bed of large flat stones, where the water sometimes ran in clear little streams, between the stones—sometimes was, for several yards, quite hidden by them. The banks were pretty flat where they entered the Beck; but soon they began to rise precipitately, and large rocks appeared of grey limestone, half covered, in many places, with ivy and creeping-plants, and the interstices filled with various gay hardy shrubs.

“That is the foot-road to Cudthorpe,” said Alice, the guide, pointing to a narrow path that disappeared amongst some trees. “We always go that way in summer, when we can cross the Beck, it is so much shorter.”

“And sometimes in winter too,” said Wilfrid laughing.

And then came the history of little Tommy and the storm. It seemed as if they were never tired of telling stories, nor Walter of listening to them, neither was Monica one whit behind apparently in her enjoyment of them.

At last they reached a wood so full of primroses that Monica would go no farther. It was years since she had gathered a primrose, and vainly did they try to tempt her to go on by telling her that the Gill was

more beautiful farther up. She would not be like the princess in the fairy tale ; she would be contented with what she saw before her. "Then I will stay too," said Margaret. "Very well," Walter said, "then the two lazy ones should be left behind, and the others would go on farther, and come back for them, or they might all meet again at the crossing of the Beck, in case the more active division took a round that they knew of." It was all right, Margaret and Monica were indifferent, for they were left in a wilderness of sweets. This was one of those pretty, undulating copse-woods where every turn seems to bring you upon a spot of beauty. It might be a bank of fresh green feathery moss, with the long leaves of the hyacinth waving from it, or it might be the gnarled root of an old tree covered with ivy, and hiding in its recesses the most charming tufts of primroses, or rosy vetch ; deep blue violets, and starry wood-roof combining to make a natural mosaic covering for the more even ground.

Monica was delighted ; Margaret was happy. She had expected to be a little frightened when left alone with the stranger ; but that was difficult, when Monica was thinking solely of the flowers ; gathering daintily the most perfect specimens, or calling on Margaret to help her to admire some newly discovered nest of treasures.

"Does your mamma like wild flowers ?" asked Monica at length.

"Oh, yes," said Margaret, "and she so rarely sees them growing now, because she is not strong enough to come into the woods."

"Then see what we will do," said Monica. "We will line this pretty open basket first with moss, a few strawberry leaves, and blossom, and small ferns may peep from it here and there. We will take the pattern

from that bank—vain fancy. That spray of ivy may twine round the handle there. Now, we will fill it with the best, first these violets and their leaves, then primroses—we have plenty—and in the centre this lovely bunch of blue forget-me-nots.”

They sat upon a low dry wall that divided the property of Sir Thomas Gresley from that of his next neighbour, a small independent statesman. An opening in the trees gave entrance to a bright gleam of sunshine that lighted up themselves, and the little space around them, as they sat employed in their pretty labour of love.

“Now I think it is perfect,” cried Monica, as the last group was inserted with delicate fingers into the centre of the basket. It was well that Katharine was not there to throw cold scorn upon her innocent delight. “If they will only keep as fresh until we reach home,” she said. The word “home” seemed to strike some chord in her memory, for she sighed and fell into deep thought for some minutes; then all at once remembering her companion, she said, turning to Margaret with a bright smile—

“It is very good of you to stay with me here.”

“I like it,” said Margaret, decidedly.

“Thanks, dear,” said Monica, “it certainly is a beautiful place; but I know that I am keeping you away from your brothers and sisters. I hope soon to be able to rival them in walking. To-day I confess that fatigue as well as the primroses detained me.”

“I am often tired, too,” said Margaret, with an air of weariness that might have been called affected, considering that just before she had been springing about amongst the flowers; but the truth was, she always had enough of lassitude about her to be able to assume the character of invalid without pretending much.

"Are you?" said Monica, with sympathy, "I know that Walter has spoken of his sister Mousey as being the delicate one—the mother's pet—that must have repaid you always for the pain of being ill."

"Oh, they always called me the pet," said Margaret, "but I do not think it is quite true. They say it to tease me, and Alice never understands how dreadful it is to have such a headache that one cannot do anything scarcely—not great pain, though I have that sometimes—but enough to make one feel so stupid that one would like to sit still for hours, and never be spoken to."

"Poor Margaret," said Monica, kindly; "I could scarcely have felt for you a year ago, but latterly I have suffered so much from weakness in different forms that I can sympathise with any continual ailment of that sort."

"I am so glad you are not strong," said Margaret, naïvely.

"Thanks," exclaimed Monica, laughing merrily.

"Oh, I do not mean that," said Margaret, blushing; "but Katharine thought you would be so large and strong, and I should not have liked you then half so much."

"What a comfort that I have disappointed your sister's expectations," said Monica. "I expected that you would picture me to yourselves, as I did you."

"Oh! do tell me what you fancied us," said Margaret.

"Pretty much what you appeared to me last night," said Monica, "for I had Walter's minute descriptions to build upon, you know. Many an evening when we were abroad he has beguiled me from sad thoughts by talking of the brothers and sisters that he had given to me."

"Oh, tell me what he said of us," urged Margaret.

"Nay, I think that would hardly be fair," replied the other. "I have already said how truly he had described you all; but, after all, it is curious to notice how soon previous conceptions fade away before truth. We may be a little confused at first between the two, but soon the one becomes absorbed in the other."

"I hope that will not happen to mine," said Margaret.

"Was it so good?" asked Monica, with a smile; "then, pray, lift not up the rosy veil. In sober earnest, dear Margaret, I am afraid that you must prepare for a little disappointment: however, do not judge me hastily. Love me first, and judge me afterwards. I think that should be the motto for us all, and let charity be the guardian angel that presides. But are not we staying here too long?" added Monica, starting up. "I have made you grave, dear Margaret; let us go and find some merrier companions."

As they went down into the Beck again, Margaret said, "You don't know how I like it. The others are all so silly. They will never talk in earnest: it is always on the surface—not what they are thinking in their heart of hearts. It often seems false to me."

"The nature of the surface depends upon that of the depths below," said Monica; "but it would neither be healthy nor pleasant to be always stirring to the bottom. Look how that tiny streamlet sparkles, bubbles, and leaps brightly along. We know its purity by the brightness of its sparkling. It reflects the light that falls upon it: we may do more with purified hearts, we may reflect the Light Eternal from above."

Monica started and stopped, for at this moment a great dog leaped from the opposite bank, and splashed

through the stream that Monica had been watching as she spoke.

"This is Gaspar, Sir Thomas's Newfoundland," said Margaret, trying to avoid his damp caresses. "They must be near." A whistle was now heard, and Gaspar galloped away down the Beck. "They are crossing from Cudthorpe, then. Shall we hurry on and meet them?"

Before they had gone six yards, Alice's voice was heard calling from the same direction as the whistle, "Meg, Meg, come down here."

"They are all there, then," said Margaret, "let us go."

They soon turned the corner of a rock, and then they saw Alice coming to meet them, accompanied by Elinor and Emma Gresley. They soon reached them, and the girls exchanged warm salutations, after which the strangers were introduced to Monica.

"Walter sent us for you," said Alice to the latter; "Sir Thomas was coming to Eildon, when we luckily met him in the woods, so he, and Walter, and Wilfrid are walking on, Katharine is waiting for us at the crossing, and we are to follow them."

"Very well," said Monica, only smiling at the desertion of the young husband, whose every word and look had been hers alone for three months before.

As they walked farther down the Beck, Elinor Gresley came round to Margaret's side, and as usual began to confide to her in an under-tone many important private matters; fortunately she did not require much encouragement or many answers, for more than half Margaret's attention was given all the time to Monica, who had taken the little girl's hand to help her over the stones, and was speaking kindly to her, or giving gay replies to Alice's wild sallies.

Below the crossing they found Katharine, who

admired the flowers Margaret carried quite enough to please the gatherers very much, and then they all went on together. Instead of scrambling through the plantation path, they went up the open pasture to save time, and so gained upon their pioneers, that when they reached the high road, they could perceive them not very far before them. Sir Thomas Gresley was in the middle, striding along, with large and rapid steps, tall, broad-shouldered, with leathern gaiters to protect his active legs, a prodded stick in his hand, and a little terrier keeping generally close at his heels. On his right was Walter, also tall, but looking almost slender by comparison, more fashionable in his dress, apparently talking to Sir Thomas with somewhat of respect. At the other side was Wilfrid, shorter, broader built than Walter, his curly brown hair showing even at that distance under his blue flannel cap; more restless than the others, he sometimes stretched across in front of his guardian to speak to Walter, at other times looked up earnestly at Sir Thomas, plainly talking fast, often turning half round to throw a word to the little terrier, and once to nod saucily at Alice, panting far behind.

At last his companions bethought them of those who were coming after, and turning round, they stopped. A few words from Sir Thomas, and then they began more slowly to retrace their steps, soon again so earnestly engaged in conversation that they did not stop until they were close upon the others, and a laugh from Alice recalled them to proprieties. Then Monica was duly introduced; Sir Thomas made his courtliest bow, shook hands, and paid his compliments, then walked on with her and Walter, whilst the younger ones fell behind; and in this fashion they all proceeded to the house. They found Miss Connor and the mother walking in the garden, and remained a little time there

with them, before they all went into luncheon. Not till then would Monica present her flowers, because she would not have them compared with their gayer and more flaunting sisters, but indoors they were offered, and accepted as sweetly as they were given.

A large and merry party it was around the luncheon-table, and when Sir Thomas insisted upon going, the girls were forcibly detained for several good reasons, the principal one being that they could go home so nicely in the carriage at night, because Miss Gresley and Sir Thomas were coming then to dinner.

"Settle it with Lavinia, then," said Sir Thomas, laughing as he went away, "I wash my hands of the matter altogether."

No sooner had the girls been left, than Margaret changed her mind about them, and began to think that Elinor would be very tiresome to have all the afternoon, when she intended to have been with Monica. To Alice their staying was a matter of indifference, as she would never have thought of their interfering with her own pursuits, which this afternoon were to be whatever Wilfrid might be doing, as every minute she intended should be spent with him. Happily for Elinor, Monica retired almost directly after luncheon to her own sitting-room, to write letters, and Margaret was therefore obliged to be contented with her humbler friend, in whom at least she was sure to find an attentive listener, and accordingly, after leaving Emma upon Miss Connor's hands, the two girls repaired to an arbour in the shrubbery, where Margaret regaled Elinor with her opinion of Monica and various other matters, for the greater part of the afternoon.

CHAPTER XIII.

The nurse took up the squealing child,
But still the child squealed on.—*DR. JOHNSON.*

THE pleasant conversation of the two friends was interrupted by the sound of wheels upon the carriage-road.

"There is Aunt Swinton," exclaimed Margaret. "How stupid of them to have come so soon. We must go in now, because of poor Wilfrid's having to go away." They sat in the arbour a few minutes longer, however, until Alice came running to summon them. "The coast was clear," she said, "Aunt Swinton and Georgina had gone at once to their rooms, fatigued; but there is Aunt Jane too, and she has asked for you, and Wilfrid has to go away in half an hour."

Margaret was now obliged to return to the house, and, followed by her constant friend, she went directly to the drawing-room. Here her aunt Jane was talking so quickly and earnestly to Walter, that at first she did not perceive her niece; and when Margaret went up to her, only kissed her hastily, said, "How d'ye do, my dear?" and finished her sentence to Walter in the same breath. Her uncle Swinton was, however, also in the room, so Margaret next advanced to him. He was a tall, grave man, with grey hair, and cold blue eyes, which he fixed upon her, as he shook hands with her, and afterwards asked her several questions, such as, how old she was, what she was learning, if she could ride, and others, which made Margaret feel timid and awkward, and almost as if she were at Oakington. She was truly glad to escape when an opportunity was given her, by her

aunt Jane turning round quickly to call upon her brother-in-law to confirm something she was telling Walter; and followed still by Elinor, who, by keeping at the other end of the room, had remained unnoticed, she went away in search of Wilfrid.

That young gentleman was speedily found, in his own room, very busily packing some chemicals that he wanted to take back with him to school, Alice in attendance, holding hammer and nails, getting him thread, or any other of the little offices she delighted to perform for him. It was with some trepidation that Margaret and her friend entered this sanctum, of which Alice alone had the freedom generally, but where, thanks to Wilfrid's pre-occupation, the others were now permitted to remain. Elinor found amusement in examining the various curiosities, and Margaret joined in the desultory remarks that were going on. At last the half hour had nearly gone. "Only five minutes, I declare," cried Wilfrid, looking at his watch; "sisters, I must go, or I shall be too late for locking-up, and that would be as much as my life, or at least my honour, is worth. So Alice, will you hold the box without shaking it, whilst I run and bid mamma 'good-bye?'"

"Stop a minute, please Wilfrid," said Margaret, "until I give you a message for Cherry."

"Excuse me, Meg," cried Wilfrid, "I know it all without—your love, and you hope to see her soon—and probably I should forget to deliver it," he added, as he ran away.

Very soon he came back for his treasures, allowed his sisters to kiss him, desired Alice to be careful to shut the door, and turn the key, and then shook hands with Elinor. As he was leaving the room, he turned round to say, "What a stunner Georgina is. I rather wish I was staying. But I fancy that Kate does not

love her," and then he went his way, not forgetting, however, to stop to shake hands with Miss Connor in the schoolroom, before he proceeded to the carriage.

After hearing the sound of its retreating wheels, the girls for the first time were at a loss to know what to do with themselves, seeing that to-day they were to find themselves separated from Katharine and the grown-up portion of the household. It was very grievous to think that the drawing-room was no longer free to them, and that until they were dressed for the evening they had better keep entirely out of sight, and more particularly out of the way of their aunt Swinton, as Katharine had informed them. Miss Connor and the schoolroom were more distasteful to them than ever. "I protest against going there," said Alice, after she had obeyed her brother's last behest. "To-day, at least, is holiday, to-morrow will be time enough for the slavery to begin; and perhaps by that time we may be able to invent some plan of getting out of it."

"The library would be the snuggest place to go to," said Margaret; "no one will come there now, I think, and I left my book there yesterday."

"Well, bad is the best," said Alice; "however, come along."

"Please, Margaret, may we take Emma with us, do you think?" asked Elinor.

"Poor little mortal," said Alice, "where is she all this time?"

"We left her with Miss Connor," said Margaret. "We must go for her."

"No, we really cannot enter the lion's den," said Alice; "we should be snapped up. The child likes best to be quiet. She will be very happy, won't she, Elinor?"

"Yes," answered Elinor, hesitatingly, "only she will

not like being left so long. I will go to her, please, Alice."

"You really cannot do that," said Alice, hastily, with her usual forgetfulness of the courtesy due to a guest; then she added, "Look, suppose we get Tom or Minnie to go and fetch her."

"I can go," said Margaret; "why should I not?"

"Because you would have to stay, of course," said Alice. "Take my advice, and send Tom."

"Then I will have nothing to do with it, Alice; it is one of your roundabout plans," said Margaret, crossly; "I will go and read comfortably in the library. I will get you a book too, Elinor, if you will come."

"I advise you not," said Alice; "I think I can promise you better entertainment than that. Come with me, Elinor."

It was so rare a thing that Elinor was flattered by Alice's desiring her company, albeit she did not like to refuse Margaret anything she asked. Her wish to relieve her little sister threw the weight into the other scale, and she went upstairs with Alice. As they rattled along the gallery, they met a strange maid carrying a tray with tea-cups on it. "That is for my fine aunt and cousin," said Alice, with a grimace of contempt, in an audible whisper to her companion, at which the maid drew herself up, and no doubt would retail the remark to Miss Georgina.

Arrived in the nursery they found the two children sitting on the floor playing with their bricks. Tommy had nearly finished a high tower, and Minnie was watching in breathless anxiety, with her mouth open, the putting on of the last few stones. Matty, knitting near the window, knowing how likely they were to disturb the present peace, did not give them a glance of welcome as they entered.

"Tommy, I want you to run an errand for me," said Alice.

"He's not to leave the nursery, Miss Alice," said Matty, with decision, "nor Miss Minnie either, till they've had their tea, and are dressed to go down to see their aunt and uncle before dinner."

"Come, Matty, don't be cross," said Alice, coaxingly; "Tommy can just run down the back staircase and never be seen. I will build you a splendid arch, Tommy, if you will go."

"Where to?" asked Master Tom, prudently.

"Go downstairs to the schoolroom, and open the door very quietly."

"I can't open the door," put in Tommy, but his whole soul, at that moment, was in the placing of the topmost brick.

"Then you can just knock at the door as you do when you go to your lessons," said Alice, "and say, 'If you please, Miss Connor, we want Emma;' and then bring that nice, good-natured Emma Gresley up here to play with you. She can do all sorts of things."

"Now, Miss Alice," said Matty, "I jealous that you're after some mischief."

"Not a bit, you suspicious old Matty," said Alice, playfully. "It is all good-nature of me to get the child out of the schoolroom, where I believe she has been cooped up all the afternoon. You are no friend to children being kept shut up, I know, Matty."

The old nurse was easily won over by Alice, although she always "jealoused" her, as she called it; and she allowed Tommy to be persuaded to leave his bricks and let himself be conveyed by Alice into the gallery. Here he trotted along to the top of the back staircase, and then Alice returned to the nursery. She had scarcely entered the room, when the noise of a fall was

heard, or rather, a succession of falls, followed by loud piercing shrieks.

"Oh, my boy! you've killed him," cried Matty, throwing down her knitting, and hastening to the spot from whence the sounds proceeded. Alice, Elinor, and Minnie followed, the latter crying loudly as she went.

At the same moment several doors in different parts of the galleries opened, and out of the rooms came people alarmed in different degrees. Mrs. Swinton, Georgina, Katharine, and Mrs. Bruce, hastened to the top of the staircase, whilst from below came Monica, Miss Connor, and the little girl; behind them, Walter and his uncle, and in the distance, servants from various parts of the house, all attracted by the alarming noise.

The foremost of the crowd was Monica, who had, in the schoolroom, been nearest to the scene of action, and she found Tommy lying at the bottom of the staircase, drenched with water, and his face all bleeding. The wet stairs, an empty can beside him, and the terrified exclamation of a young housemaid, who appeared for a moment, and then ran away again, sufficiently explained the immediate cause of the accident.

"Oh, my bairn!" cried Matty, rushing unceremoniously past the ladies, whilst Alice, pale with fear, attempted no answer to their questions. Monica had raised the child just as Matty reached him, and she said to Mrs. Bruce, who with trembling steps was coming down, "I do not think that he is very much hurt, it is his nose that is bleeding," and then she placed him in his mother's arms.

"What, Tommy, my boy," said Walter, just arriving, "how did you come here?"

"I wanted Emma," said Tommy, roaring loudly as he spoke, but comforting his mother greatly by the words.

"I think the child is not much worse," said Mr. Swinton; then shrugged his shoulders slightly, and retreated from the crowd. The servants, who were lurking round, now disappeared again, with some expressions of pity, and perhaps of disappointment that the catastrophe had not been greater. Georgina, who had only reached the top of the staircase, and stood there cool and undisturbed, merely said to Katharine, who was standing near her, "Do the children often roll down here?" and whilst Katharine was collecting her utmost strength of sarcasm to retort, she too walked away. Mrs. Swinton, in the mean time, was observing to Walter in a quiet tone, "I always take care that my children's rooms are entirely apart from the rest of the house, for these things are so disturbing; I feel that my nerves have received a serious shock," and Matty having speedily relieved her mistress of her burden, saying, "Let me have him, a sweet lamb, for you're all of a tremble, ma'am," was now conveying the still screaming victim towards the nursery, soothing and rocking him as she went, and followed by his mother, and afterwards by Mrs. Swinton. They were met by Aunt Jane, who not having been entirely in presentable attire when the first sounds of woe were heard, had been unable to appear until the first alarm was over, and was now holding up her dress and picking her way daintily down the wet steps, asking questions, pitying Tom, and taking the opportunity to censure Matty.

"It was not Matty, Aunt Jane," said Alice, now speaking for the first time. "I had sent Tommy an errand to the schoolroom, and I suppose, poor fellow, he fell against the can and then rolled downstairs with it."

"Ah, I thought there was more in it than we knew at first. Carelessness everywhere, it appears"—and with this she looked severely at Miss Connor, who was still

standing with little Emma in the passage below—"as usual, neglect on all sides. It is really a most extraordinary thing, I am quite ashamed that Mrs. Swinton and Mrs. Walter Bruce should receive such an impression of you all. However, I must now go and see what injury this sweet child has really received."

Monica took advantage of the move, for Miss Swinton had previously blocked up the narrow staircase, and followed to the nursery. Then Miss Connor, looking puzzled, grieved, and unhappy, told Alice to come away, as there would already be people enough with the child, and bring Elinor with her to the schoolroom.

Miss Connor was right in saying that there were plenty of people in the nursery; for when Monica arrived, Matty was sitting by the fire, with Tommy in her lap; Susan near, holding Minnie, who was crying again to see her brother in such a state; Mrs. Bruce was watching Matty's operations with some anxiety; Mrs. Swinton was suggesting remedies, and throwing in little hints about the propriety of having a gate fixed at the top of the staircase, and not allowing the children to descend at night alone; and Katharine and Walter were talking to each other at the opposite end of the room. Matty was alternately soothing the little boy and consoling her mistress. "Never heed, ma'am; he'll be as well as ever in a day or two. Now, my honey—now, he shall have the Noah's ark down to-night, and anything he fancies for his tea. It's only his face as is bruised, ma'am—not a bone broke, for I've tried them, poor little dear; and never out of my sight shall he be 'ticed again."

It seemed, as Matty said, the injuries were chiefly confined to his face; for there was a cut on his eyebrow, a lump on his head, and a great swelling of his upper lip, which increased every moment, but no bruise of

any consequence elsewhere; so, very soon, Mrs. Swinton retired; and Walter then, declaring that Matty would, no doubt, be glad to get rid of them all, invited his aunt Jane to come and see Monica's pretty sitting-room; and Monica seconding the invitation, the nursery was soon cleared of all but those who were likely to be useful.

Miss Jane did not stay long with them, because of the toilet business; so Monica had time just to run and see how they were going on in the nursery, before she began to dress. She found Tommy, washed and fresh dressed, lying in his mother's arms, much disfigured, but, now that he had ceased crying, inclined to sleep; and they trusted that he had received no other injury. The girl Maria, whose carelessness had caused the mischief, had been seen and reprimanded. The rest of the blame might have been shared by Matty and Alice, had not the former declared that it was all owing to Miss Alice's ways of getting over her; but that she would take good care the like should never be again.

Monica expressed her sympathy with the poor little boy, and then said that she thought she would herself go to the schoolroom, and give them an account of him, as Alice, especially, would be uneasy, seeing that she had remotely caused the accident.

"Mr. Walter has drawn a prize," said Matty approvingly, as the young lady left the room; and Mrs. Bruce smiled a happy acquiescence.

Her little visit was a boon downstairs. Alice had been disposed to resent, as injustice, Miss Connor's lecture upon her heedless disregard to the safety of the little ones, and would give no explanation of the reason of the child's being sent to the schoolroom. Elinor and Emma were shocked at Alice's cool manner, and

grieved at the state of things altogether, and were sitting stiff and uncomfortable, whilst the table was being prepared for tea.

"I am glad to hear that the poor child is not seriously injured," said Miss Connor, after she had heard Monica's report. "I trust that the shock will make an impression upon Alice. Her heedlessness might have caused the death of her little brother, as I have just told her."

"Maria's, rather," said Alice; "I did not put the can of water in the child's way."

"Go and tell your sister Margaret to come to tea," said Miss Connor, judging it better to take no notice of her want of respect in speech and manner; then, only preserving with an effort her usual calmness, she said to Monica, "Will you allow me to offer you some tea, Mrs. Bruce?"

"No, thank you," replied Monica; "I am hastening back to dress. We shall see you all in the evening, I believe."

"That was the arrangement," said Miss Connor, hesitatingly; "but really, Alice's behaviour makes it doubtful whether an indulgence of this sort would be wise for her."

"She has already been punished for her share of the misfortune," said Monica, with an extenuating smile. "She has scarcely yet recovered from the fright, I see."

"I am afraid you think me too strict," said Miss Conner, rather unhappily; "but you do not know how quickly dear Alice takes advantage of any laxity."

"Indeed, I think you very kind to them," said Monica, "and, pray, do not let anything I have said influence you against your own good judgment. But I really must go now. Good-bye, Emma. We will finish 'Puss in Boots' another day."

In the hall she met the girls. "What do you think, Monica? Meg has been so wrapped in her book, that she has never heard a bit of all this row."

"And I never knew that you were in the schoolroom so long, or I should have come there instead of going to the library," said Margaret, in an injured tone. "Are you going to dress? May I come and see you? I am always with mamma when she goes out."

Monica nodded, and was passing on, when Alice said, "Don't you pity us, having to go back to that stupid schoolroom and Miss Connor?"

"No; I think I rather pity Miss Connor and the schoolroom for having such a troublesome inhabitant," said Monica, laughing as she went away.

Miss Connor changed her mind about banishing Alice from the drawing-room, and, accordingly, all from the schoolroom appeared there after dinner. The party was a quiet one: only the clergyman, Mr. Meadows, and his wife, besides Sir Thomas and Miss Gresley, and the people already in the house. Elinor and Emma were in a little trepidation when Miss Lavinia, dressed in a rich brocaded silk and fine old lace, sailed into the room; but that her approbation had already been gained was evident, for she only said, "Late hours for you, Emma," and made Elinor a sign to sit upright. Mrs. Swinton, handsome, well-dressed, and always disposed to make herself comfortable, had recovered from the shock to her nerves, and spoke condescendingly to her nieces before she sat down for the evening in an easy chair, and talked to Mrs. Meadows about poultry, plants, and servants. Georgina naturally fell to Katharine's share; her first question, as she reclined in a low chair, and gently yawned behind her pocket-handkerchief, was, "How do you like your new sister-in-law?" Georgina was the last person with

whom Katharine would have discussed anything or any one belonging to their own household, so she gave a general answer ; and Georgina proceeded to remark, as she quietly stared at Monica, "What a peculiar face it is ! There is much decision about the mouth. I am a great believer in physiognomy, and I pity you all."

Katharine was indignant at the idea of being pitied, and her ladylike instinct for once told her that all this was not very nice ; so she merely replied coolly, "Monica is considered very pretty, I believe. She was much admired in Rome ; her picture was visited by hundreds in some great artist's studio. Will you try our piano ?"

No ; Georgina was much too fatigued for music ; but after some time Katharine, at her godmother's request, performed very creditably, and was told by Georgina that she played charmingly, but that she really ought to have some lessons from Mr. Z—— in town next year. Again, for Miss Lavinia, Katharine good-naturedly sang an old favourite of Sir Henry Bishop's, at which Miss Swinton, Aunt Jane, nodded her head in time and sighed ; Sir Thomas Gresley, who had come in in the middle, clapped his hands when she had finished ; and Walter said, "Bravo, Kate ; how much you have improved. You must get Monica to practise some duetts with you : she would give you the Italian style."

Poor Katharine ! it seemed as if all the praise was to be qualified with something disagreeable ; however, she only asked, "Does Monica sing ?"

"Does she ?" repeated Walter, proudly ; "you must hear her ; you will be delighted. I wonder if she is able to sing to-night." He would have gone to ask her, but at this moment Mrs. Bruce was saying, at the other side of the room, "Georgina, my dear, will

you give us a little music?" and Georgina, knowing that her father was not far off, durst not give way to any of her airs, and immediately took possession of the piano. Her voice was harsh in quality, but possessed a good deal of power, which she forced into exaggerated expression as she sang an affecting German song. There was little real music in the singing, for the spirit of it was not there, but the accompaniment, an intricate one, she played very well, and did Mr. Z—— great credit. Her mother looked round with complacency, but said to Mrs. Bruce, when the song was ended, "Ah, Georgina does not sing as I should wish her yet. We intend her to have more lessons from Signor Maravedi in the spring. Are your younger girls musical?"

"Alice is too idle, I am afraid, to make much progress," answered Mrs. Bruce. "Margaret has much talent and a fine contralto voice, but she is very fastidious in her choice of music, and dislikes the drudgery of practising."

"They all do that, I believe," said Mrs. Swinton, looking with some contempt upon the little party at a distant table, where Miss Connor was working, and Elinor and Margaret looking over prints together, with Mr. Meadows standing near, and sometimes talking to them. "Your girls have few advantages here, my dear Ellen; I wish that you had allowed Margaret to come to Oakington."

This was an unpleasant subject to Mrs. Bruce, and she was grateful to Monica, who at this period unconsciously stopped it, by striking a few chords on the piano before she began her song. Few people would have continued their conversation during such a song. Monica's rich mellow voice had been cultivated by care and industry to a perfection rarely heard in private; and whilst there was not the least attempt at display

either in voice or expression, and the whole was modulated to a gentle pitch, there was yet such a finished style about every bar, such a musical soul breathing through the whole, that, without thinking of criticism, you might sit still and be delighted.

It was a treat to every one in the room, even to Sir Thomas, who used to tell the girls that he did not know any tune but "God save the Queen," and yet was always pleased with music. Katharine, spite of herself, was charmed, and Margaret only needed this to complete the fascination that the beautiful Monica had created in her enthusiastic mind. She was standing close to the piano now, and she gave a sigh, and said, "How beautiful!"

Monica laughed a little, and patted Margaret's arm affectionately. "You like music, I see, Mousey?"

"Yours I do," said Margaret; "but some I perfectly detest."

There was no time for more. Monica was pressed to sing, and sing again. "A professed singer, evidently," said Georgina, who was somewhat envious. "I will tell you, Katharine, how you may know them. They never begin their performance until nearly the close of the evening, and then they never leave the music stool till the end."

This was too much for Katharine, and she left her cousin to go and show Elinor Gresley some cameos, at which Miss Lavinia, who observed everything, was pleased, and, meanwhile, Monica sang again.

After Mr. Meadows had obtained a willing answer to his earnest petition that Monica would take some interest in his little choir of girls and boys at Sonny-sides, he and his wife took their leave, and immediately Miss Lavinia begged her nieces to go and get ready for their journey home. Of course Miss Connor and the

rest of the party retired at the same time, upon which Alice grumbled much. "To be sent to bed like babies ! to follow Miss Connor like so many school-children ! I vow, Margaret, I will not stand it ;" and instead of going to assist her friends, she got no further than the staircase window, where she poured out her grievances.

"I don't know, Alice," said Margaret ; "I think it is only right, but I really must go to Elinor."

"Very well, Meg," replied her sister ; "then I will stay here, thinking, till you come back. Miss Connor often tells me to be thoughtful, so I will for once try it ;" and, so saying, Alice settled herself in the corner of the window seat, as if she had been going to remain there for an hour. It would, perhaps, have been better for her if she had.

CHAPTER XIV.

It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you.

SHAKESPEARE.

IF Alice had at any time announced to the rest of the house that she had intended to sit still and think for any given length of time, there would certainly have been a laugh of derision at the very idea. Matty often said that Miss Alice had an ounce of quicksilver in her blood ; and whether the assertion was true or false in a scientific point of view, the young lady's habits certainly gave some foundation for it, as now, when after remaining quiet for about three minutes and a half, she started up suddenly, and ascending the rest of the staircase, turned along the gallery, with the intention of looking into the nursery to see how Tommy was, her uneasiness about his accident being greater than she would have liked her friends to see.

The gallery was only dimly lighted by a lamp that hung at the top of the staircase, and as Alice, in her thin shoes, stepped noiselessly and quickly along, a door opened, and Mrs. Swinton's maid coming out without a candle in her hand, at once perceived what she supposed to be a white and mysterious figure gliding towards her. She was a girl of weak nerves, and her mind had recently been further enfeebled by the perusal of a trashy and romantic novel that she had just laid down ; and, furthermore, having been told by the silly Maria that Eildon Manor was haunted by the ghost of a lady who had once been murdered there, she imagined that

she now saw something supernatural, and with one half-choking scream, she rushed at once downstairs.

So far Alice had been quite innocent ; but upon hearing the shriek, her quick intelligence directly guessed the reason, and, without stopping an instant to reflect, she determined to pursue her victim. Downstairs the maid ran, and thither Alice ran after her, the rushing of her garments terrifying the girl still more ; but when Thomson turned towards the servants' hall, to seek protection, Alice, not caring to follow her there, hastily unfastened a door that led into the courtyard, and going to the outside of the window of the room in which the servants were, tapped loudly three times upon it with a stick, and at the same time rattled a dog's chain which fortune had placed in sight of her sharp eyes. The shrieks were now redoubled ; but happily there were some stronger minds amongst them than this poor Thomson's, and Patience was one of the first to suggest that some one outside was trying to frighten her for sport. Adams called the latter a sensible lass, bid the other hold her noise, and, arming himself with a good stout stick, said he would go and put an end to it.

Finding the door open confirmed his suspicions, and he was sallying forth valiantly, when, to his surprise, he saw by the faint light of a half-obscured moon a white figure flitting across the courtyard ; but at this moment a bell rang, and he was obliged to postpone his search, and go to attend upon the departing guests. Meantime Miss Thomson's hysterics were being allayed, and when he came back he was glad to find that most of the maids had gone ; and he said to Mrs. Cook that he hoped to hear no more of such unsenseless work.

Alice's share in the matter was not concluded quite so easily. She had heard Adams come out, and then,

for the first time, the possibility and unpleasantness of discovery had come into her mind, and directly she darted across the yard, intending to slip back again round by the front door, and be quietly sitting in the staircase window again, when Margaret and her friends should come downstairs. But she was too late for that. As she passed through the door that communicated between the courtyard and the grounds in front of the house, she saw, to her dismay, that Sir Thomas Gresley's carriage had just driven round, and was standing before the hall-door. To go in just now was impossible; there were servants about the carriage, and voices in the hall, backwards or forwards detection was in the way, and for a minute Alice stood irresolute, when her eye caught sight of a belt of thick shrubs that, forming a perfectly dark mass, seemed to promise concealment. The next minute she had crept towards them, and, hiding herself behind a large arbutus-tree, resolved to wait until the carriage had driven off, and then to slip into the house, and trust to Miss Connor's good-nature not to make too close inquiries about the reason of her absence.

She waited there perhaps ten minutes, but it seemed far longer, whilst the adieux were being made, and the carriage filled, then she heard Sir Thomas's cheery voice calling out, "Good-night, and mind they are all to come," and then the coachman gathered up his reins, and the two greys trotted off.

As soon as they had passed Alice's hiding-place, she peeped out, but fancying that she still heard talking, she kept in ambush a few minutes longer, and then crept out, and laid her hand upon the handle of the hall-door. Alas for old Adams' vigilance! he had only waited until the guests had departed, and immediately the bolts were drawn, and all the doors made safe.

Alice's breath almost stopped when she found that her efforts to open it were in vain ; she flew across to the courtyard door, that was bolted too ; the drawing-room window shutters closed, and no voices to be heard ; every one must have retired quickly, and lights appearing in the upper windows, showed that most of the inmates were going to bed.

A pleasant situation—now that the poor girl truly realized it. Miss Connor would be finding out that she was absent, and Katharine, too, whose room she shared : they would search for her, and then all might be discovered. Oh ! if she might only spend the night out-of-doors without detection, welcome the cold dews and the solitude, anything rather than exposure to Aunt Jane's remarks, and the Swintons' observations. These were what she dreaded most, and, to say the truth, besides them, came a vision of the sad troubled look upon her mother's face ; but this she did not dwell upon.

Backwards and forwards, up and down she paced, every moment increasing her anxiety. It was poor comfort to assure herself that it was but a lark ; all her courage seemed to have oozed out ; she tried pretending not to care, called herself a donkey, and thought of Wilfrid, and how he would laugh, but all to no effect—she was cold, trembling, wrong to stay out, and yet lacking spirit to be her own executioner and ring the bell.

She was deliberating upon the possibility of in any way reaching Miss Connor's window, which, though a high one, was rather by itself, at the other side of the house, when she was startled by hearing an unbolting of the hall-door. Involuntarily she shrank round the corner as it opened, and hid behind the projecting window of the drawing-room ; but it was no use. The perfume of a recently-lighted cigar came round the

corner after her, and stronger and stronger as its holder came more near, until close to where she stood, panting so that her breathing could be distinctly heard in the evening stillness, the figure of a man appeared.

"Who is that?" said a clear, commanding voice, evidently surprised at finding anybody there.

"Oh, Walter," half shrieked Alice, "please don't tell any one; I will do anything if you won't. Pity me, Walter, and don't tell anybody. Just let me go in."

Walter had seized her, though gently enough, by the arm, and had drawn her forward a little more into the dim light, such as it was, for coming out of the comparative brightness of the house, he could not see so well as Alice could.

"Tell what?" he said. "However came you here?"

"Please don't ask me, dear Walter," said Alice; "only let me just go in," and as she spoke she tried to escape from him, but then the gentle hold changed to a firmer grasp, and she ceased to struggle against it.

"I can't understand," said Walter. "Are you alone? Where is Katharine, or Miss Connor, or whoever has the care of you? What are you doing here?"

"There is no one but me," answered Alice. "Please let me go, they do not know, they will wonder where I am."

"Very likely," said her brother. "Come, Alice, I am not going to let you go, until you tell me what it is all about. If you do not, your uncle will be here, he was to follow me in a few minutes, and he must make you explain."

"Oh, Walter," cried Alice, with tears of entreaty now bursting forth, "let me go in, and I will tell you everything."

Walter threw away his cigar, and without relaxing the least his firm hold of her arm, led her into the

house, across the now darkened hall, upstairs, and to the door of Monica's room, without speaking another word. Here he knocked, then put his head just within the door, and made his wife a signal to dismiss her maid; and to give her time to do so, conducted Alice round by his dressing-room, and after ascertaining that Patience had been sent away, appeared with his shivering, weeping charge before the astonished Monica.

"Alice," exclaimed she, half laughing at first, "where have you been? Miss Connor has been in an agony about you."

"Oh! do, Walter, let me go," struggled Alice; and Monica then for the first time saw her face.

"Is something wrong?" she asked. "What is it, Walter?"

"I don't know, my dear," said Walter, sternly, "I have yet to learn myself."

"Had I not better go and tell poor Miss Connor?" said Monica, hastily; "she was really uneasy. Only that you are safe—not a word more, if you like."

She was gone in a moment, and passed along the other gallery to the end where Miss Connor's room was situated, opposite to the nurseries.

Meanwhile, Walter set a chair for Alice, got a warm shawl and put it round her shoulders. No words were spoken by either, but Alice's tears began again, and she hid her face in both her hands.

Then Monica came back. "I have just set her mind at rest, poor thing; she was positively trembling. Margaret was with her, and I think they were afraid of alarming your mother, and yet wanted to begin a search for her. Where have you had her, Walter? How cold you are, dear."

"Nay, do not blame me, Monica," said her husband. "I merely went out, tempted by the beauty of the

night, to have a cigar upon the terrace, and there, just behind the drawing-room window, alone, in this thin dress, and apparently wishing for concealment, I found my sister. That is all I know. I have brought her here, to know the rest."

"Shall I go away, love?" said Monica; "perhaps she will like to tell you best alone."

"You needn't go, Monica," said Alice, ceasing her tears, and speaking with rather a bravado air. "There is nothing to make such a great fuss about. One of the maids chose to be frightened at nothing, so I ran downstairs after her; and as I didn't want to get amongst the rest of the servants, I came round to the front door, but the carriage was there, so I hid in the shrubbery, and when I came out all the doors were bolted, and I did not know what to do, and I was that way when Walter came." Alice was covered with confusion and blushes as she told her tale of folly. If there had been anything grand about it, she would only have enjoyed the fun of being shut out; but the unworthiness of the cause made her wild with mortification, and as she finished, she said, desperately, "Now, Walter, I may surely go."

Walter looked at his wife, and an involuntary smile crossed his face. He was vastly relieved in one sense, and the ridiculousness of the affair struck him first; but then he thought of the thoughtlessness, the vulgarity, the foolishness of his sister, and he became very grave, as he said—

"What a naughty, troublesome girl you are, Alice. If I let you go, it will only be into Miss Connor's hands, with a strict charge that she takes better care of you."

"You may take me to Miss Connor, if you like, Walter," said Alice, "but please don't tell anybody

else. I should never hear the last of it—Aunt Jane, Uncle Swinton. Oh, Monica, make him promise.”

“You seem to care for nothing but being found out, Alice,” said Walter, impatiently; “I believe the best thing will be to tell your uncle at once, and let him decide what is to be done with you, in order to avoid these scenes in future. What do you say, Monica?”

“I think, love,” replied his wife, “that it would be well, if you were to allow Alice to go to bed now. She is very cold. Her mamma, too, may be disturbed.”

“Ah, true, my mother,” said Walter, with a changing countenance. “She looked very far from well to-night. I should be very sorry to disturb her rest. For her sake, then, Alice, you may go now; in the morning I will speak to you again, and I will accompany you now. I fancy you are not to be trusted the length of the corridor.”

“Good-night, Alice,” said Monica, holding out her hand. Alice took it passively, and then followed her brother.

They reached Miss Connor’s room without encountering any one, as Alice had feared they might; she perceived them at her door with some surprise.

“I have brought my sister to you,” said Walter, “and I would advise you to keep your eye upon her, lest she get into any further mischief.” There was sufficient implied censure in this speech to make Miss Connor feel unhappy; nor did she recover when Walter, after adding, “I am sorry that Alice should give you so much trouble,” bid her a courteous good-night.

Nor did Alice’s manner tend to comfort her when they were left alone together, Margaret having already, though reluctantly, been obliged to go to her mamma’s room, for she would scarcely vouchsafe any explanation; and Miss Connor was left for some time to conceive all

manner of misbehaviour that might have made Mr. Bruce look so displeased and grave. At last, after scolding, and reasoning, and pleading, on the one side, and sullenness and impatience on the other, Alice, in desperation, and because Miss Connor seemed to think that she must have been doing something very shocking, told her all, and then, in spite of being very cold and miserable, was able to amuse herself with the mixture of emotions that her tale produced in her too-kind governess. It ended in the usual way, Miss Connor's evident distress somewhat softened Alice so far that she said there was far too much fuss made about it, of course she was sorry, and Miss Connor accepted that as an evidence of penitence, which however might have been short-lived, had not an interruption happened, in the shape of Katharine, who came in her dressing-gown to inquire what Alice was doing, and "if she was to be kept awake all night."

"Go, my dear," said Miss Connor, and Alice obeyed, and Katharine, too sleepy and tired after her unusual exertions to do more than grumble at Alice's gossiping so long with Miss Connor, took no notice of the evident signs of something wrong, and very soon fell asleep. Not yet were the various troubles of the day quite finished. In the middle of the night, Mrs. Bruce's fatigue and excitement ended in her having an attack of spasms, such as she had suffered from before, but so violent that Margaret became alarmed, and ran to Matty for assistance.

There was no real necessity for any one else, as Matty could administer the remedies that had been ordered; but it was Matty's opinion that Miss Bruce ought to be with her mamma when she was so poorly, and so Katharine was roused to change places with Margaret; and this broke Alice's uneasy slumbers, and, altogether,

there was such a backwards and forwards, that it was no marvel Mrs. Swinton said next morning, that she had never been in so noisy a household in her life, they were never at rest either day or night.

Happily Mrs. Bruce's illness was but temporary, and she awoke the next morning, after a refreshing sleep, almost as well as she had been before. Not however strong enough to go down to breakfast, and Katharine, therefore, pale and fagged herself, had again to take her mother's place, and give her indisposition as the reason, but speaking lightly of it, as Mrs. Bruce, unwilling to throw a damper on her guests, had herself desired. The younger girls did not appear, for it had been settled yesterday between their mamma and governess, that their mornings were to be spent in the schoolroom undisturbed, and that, afterwards, if invited, they might join in any walk or little pleasures that might be going on.

"Is your house haunted, Katharine?" asked Mrs. Swinton, at the breakfast-table, when Walter and her husband were engaged in some discussion about public matters. "My maid, Thomson, has been nearly frightened out of her wits by an apparition."

Monica scarcely knew that she was looking conscious, until she caught Aunt Jane's curious eye fixed upon her face. Fortunately Mrs. Swinton diverted her attention from her directly afterwards.

Katharine looked surprised, and laughed, and said that she believed Matty knew a ghost story about the house, but that she had always been strictly forbidden to tell it in the nursery.

"She has probably told it in the servants' hall," said Mrs. Swinton, "for my maid Thomson tells me, that last night she had waited for me until she was tired, and was going downstairs for a candle, or something

of that sort, when she saw a white figure standing solemnly in the gallery. It moved and she screamed ; it came towards her and she ran away ; she was sure that it ran after her, and then tapped at the window of the servants' hall."

"Not liking to venture into that august assembly, I expect," said Walter, laughing, who had just begun to listen.

"A pack of nonsense!" said Mr. Swinton, angrily ; "I have always said that girl was little short of an idiot."

"But, my dear," pursued Mrs. Swinton, calmly, "Thomson could not be entirely mistaken ; if it was not a ghost, it must have been something sufficiently alarming, for the poor girl has had a violent pain in her side ever since. 'It ought to be inquired into, Katharine, my dear.'"

"Yes, aunt," said Katharine, rather pleased with the appeal to her. "If it had been a few hours later I should not have been surprised, for Matty and I and my sisters were all up, on account of mamma's illness."

"There," said Mrs. Swinton, with a gentle look of triumph at her husband, "I said that there were strange noises in the night. I should have got up, but Mr. Swinton would not hear of it : he said it might be a custom of the house."

Katharine would have scarcely noticed the sarcasm, had not an ironical smile on Georgina's lip given a disagreeable point to it. But now Walter began to be uneasy at Katharine's account, and inquired if Mr. Todd had not been sent for.

"If not, he ought to be," said Miss Jane, rising. "I know that Matty's conceit so well. She would try to persuade your mother that there was no occasion to have the doctor. I shall go and see about it, at once, myself."

A new topic having been thus suggested, the adven-

ture of Mrs. Swinton's maid was for the time laid aside, although by no means forgotten. Walter had awakened with the consciousness of an unpleasant duty, which nothing but the stern sense of his position as his mother's eldest son and rightful helper, would have made him take upon himself, and soon after breakfast he proceeded to the schoolroom.

Alice, who had always stood in some awe of her eldest brother, and especially now, when she bore that consciousness of ill-doing which makes "cowards of us all," would fain have excused herself, when he requested her to accompany him ; but she had felt his strong arm, both metaphorically and really the night before, and dared not brave his anger as freely as she would that of most other persons in the house.

So, although unwillingly, she followed him to the garden, where, as they walked up and down the terrace opposite to the house, Miss Swinton saw them from her sister's window, and remarked that Walter was teaching Alice to idle away her morning, an accomplishment in which she already quite sufficiently excelled. Mrs. Bruce replied mildly that she was glad that Alice was being so refreshed, for she had looked very pale when she came to bid her "good-morning," and no wonder, after the disturbed night that the poor girls had had, unconscious of the unrefreshing nature of the conversation that was passing between her children.

"What have you to say for yourself, this morning, Alice?" began her brother, feeling rather uncomfortable. He did not like the office of mentor to his young sisters.

"Nothing, Walter," said Alice, easily ; the 'fresh air and sunshine having an encouraging effect upon her. "You know I only began it for fun, and my being locked out was my misfortune, not my fault."

There was some truth in this, and the frank, good-

humoured way in which she said it, tended to disarm Walter's anger, and nearly made him give up the business, but he rallied.

"It is a fun that you ought to be ashamed of," said he, "low and senseless in itself, and actually dangerous to the silly young woman upon whom you practised it. They know that she was frightened by some one, and your aunt has desired Katharine to make inquiries about it."

"Oh, Katharine!" said Alice, in a cool, contemptuous tone, "then I am pretty safe."

She had gone a little too far, her easy impertinence roused Walter at last, and he spoke to her as he could scarcely have believed himself capable of doing, and for once Alice was completely silenced, and only refrained from passionate tears by the consciousness, which she was yet cool enough to remember, that their position was commanded by the drawing-room window.

"I was only prevented," Walter said, in the end, "from announcing the truth this morning, by the strong necessity I feel there is at present for keeping my mother free from excitement. This, however, shall not protect you long: and one thing you must do before the day is over—you must explain and apologize to the girl, otherwise the blame may fall upon some innocent person, and her nerves must suffer from supposing it a real fright."

Alice made no answer, and they walked up and down in silence for some time, until some voices were heard, and Katharine and Georgina appeared in a distant part of the garden. Fearful of anything being suspected, Alice became uneasy, and said, "I must go now, Walter. You do not want me any more."

This was very unsatisfactory; however, Walter did not resist her wishes, but took care not to leave her

until he had seen her safely in the schoolroom. Here some words that he let fall, attracted Margaret's attention, who was already in a somewhat melancholy mood, and looking at her sister's unusually agitated face, and then at Miss Connor's unhappy one, she became very curious, and being checked in her first inquiries, her imagination would run on in different regions of probability, and Tasso was less interesting and more difficult than it had ever been before.

As for Alice, not having much interest in her studies at any time, now less than ever did she feel inclined for the dull routine, particularly as she had a sore throat which she perversely tried to conceal, and thinking over Walter's words, chafing at his control, and yet feeling that she could not escape from it, the morning was passed in blundering lessons, careless practising, reproofs unheeded, and weariness unconcealed; and the summons to luncheon found them all, both governess and pupils, tired and discontented.

It was well that the rest of the household was in a more cheerful state. Mrs. Bruce was better, and in her usual place. Mr. Todd had paid his visit, and had given his ordinary advice. Walter could not be satisfied without having a private interview with the doctor afterwards, and there was great comfort in having his opinion, jerked out in his usual decided way, calculated certainly to inspire confidence. Results of a bad cold two years ago—worry—too much responsibility. No disease—weakness—required care and quiet—otherwise no telling the result.

Walter was relieved, and told Katharine, who had been uneasy, almost without daring to confess it to herself, and was therefore much comforted by her brother's account. Thus things might have gone very pleasantly had not Mrs. Swinton in the middle of luncheon, in the

midst of a silence addressed Mrs. Bruce with—"I took advantage of your medical man being here, to consult him about my maid Thomson, for the poor girl is useless to-day, she cannot hold a needle."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Bruce, supposing that it was some ordinary ailment.

"Yes; and he says," continued Mrs. Swinton, "that she is of a highly irritable temperament, and that a second fright of the kind might knock her up entirely. I believe that I shall be obliged to part with her, which is the more provoking, as in some respects she suits me entirely."

"I did not tell my sister anything about the matter," said Miss Jane, in a sort of apologising way, for Mrs. Bruce, though politely attending, was looking rather mystified, "for really I have always thought, Louisa, pardon me, that you were quite infatuated about that girl, I know from Benett how thoroughly idle she is."

Whilst this conversation was going on at one part of the table, Alice was undergoing a small torture at another, and various other members of the party were anything but comfortable; however, Walter, chiefly from pity to Alice, took an opportunity of causing a diversion by suggesting a drive to see some of the higher parts of the Dale, and Monica, from the same motive, eagerly seconded him.

"Let everybody go," said Aunt Jane, entering gaily into the idea, "and particularly these poor girls," pointing to Margaret and Alice, "for they look as pale as factory workers."

Mrs. Bruce looked anxiously at her young daughters, whilst the others were beginning to arrange the ways and means of transit. Some would ride, so Monica began to fill her carriage. Mrs. Bruce would not go, it would be too much for her, a quiet afternoon at home

would be the most pleasant thing for her, but no one was to stay at home on her account. The other ladies were then arranged. "You will go, Miss Connor?" said Monica, turning to the lady, but the offer was gratefully declined.

"The girls, then, and Georgina, will come with me, if Walter rides," said Monica.

"I am sorry," began Miss Connor, timidly, "but Alice cannot go, she will be engaged with me this afternoon."

"Very well," said Monica, quietly; but Miss Jane looked indignant, and although she restrained herself for a few minutes, she broke out the moment she was alone with her sister and Mrs. Swinton.

"That Miss Connor is certainly the most foolish young person that I know, Ellen. If any one needed a long drive to-day, it is that poor Alice, and so Miss Connor chooses this opportunity for a little display of authority. I should have thought that our wish might have been sufficient."

"I do not wish anything to interfere with their studies more than can be helped," said Mrs. Bruce quietly, but decidedly. "I told Miss Connor this yesterday, so she is only doing as I desired."

"You are quite right," said Mrs. Swinton. "I believe these poor governesses have quite enough uphill work with our headstrong girls, without our interfering with their system. I always say, manage your schoolroom your own way, only manage it, and do not trouble me; if they fail, of course, I change them for some one more competent. With the requirements of society and grown-up daughters, we have enough to do without being governesses;" and Mrs. Swinton, after delivering this sentiment with a complacent quietness, paused a moment to examine the leaf of a fern that was standing near, and then sailed gently out of the room.

CHAPTER XV.

One by one thy duties wait thee :
Let thy whole strength go to each,
Let no future dreams elate thee,
Learn thou first what these can teach.

A. A. PROCTER.

"MAMMA, may I not stay with you?" said Margaret, coming into the room a few minutes after Mrs. Swinton had left it; "I had much rather."

"No, darling, thank you," said her mother, affectionately, "I wish you to go out;" then she added, "what is the matter in the schoolroom, has Alice been idle?"

"Not exactly," said Margaret, blushing, and the tears coming to her eyes. "They are all very strange. I do not know quite what it is. I don't think we have either of us worked much this morning, but my head aches."

"I thought so, my dear," said her mother, tenderly smoothing the hair back from her forehead, "and I think Alice is not well. Tell her to come to me for a minute, Margaret, will you?"

The message found Alice hot and indignant, preparing for herself and Miss Connor an unpromising afternoon. She went unwillingly, but was glad to find Monica had come in, for, sadly enough, it was her mother alone, that she did not want to see.

To her mamma's questions, she replied that she was well, although her burning hand and flushed cheek gave signs of the reverse. "I wish that Mr. Todd had seen you," said Mrs. Bruce; "however, he promised to call again to-morrow, and then he must prescribe for you."

I do not think you are fit for working much this afternoon. I think I must ask Miss Connor to excuse you."

"No, thank you, mamma," said Alice, hurriedly, "I am well enough. I had much rather you would not."

Mrs. Bruce yielded, and Alice went away, but Monica followed her.

"My dear Alice," said she, "are you ill? or is it that you are so unhappy? If you feel ill, you ought not to conceal it. I wish you would let me help you."

"I wish you would not make such a fuss," said Alice, angrily, and drawing away the hand that Monica had taken, for she blamed her sister-in-law for Walter's being so stern. "It really is hard that I am to be plagued in this way. I do not see what right you have to interfere with us."

They little dreamed that Walter was close behind them.

"Alice," said he, in a voice of the deepest anger, "do you think that I am going to permit Monica to be spoken to in that way? I insist upon your apologising to her."

Alice started, and seemed about to comply, but another second and her lips were sealed.

"Dear Walter," said Monica, laying her hand upon his arm—she had never seen him so moved before—"do forgive her. She has been very much worried. I know that she has been much to blame, but a great deal was unintentional."

"Angel!" muttered Walter, between his teeth. Then turning to Alice, in whom the struggle between good and bad feelings was rapidly approaching the climax of tears, he said, "Before we return this afternoon, you must have sought your aunt's maid, and confessed to her that you were the sole cause of her fright. If you do not, I shall tell your uncle, and every one shall

know." As soon as he had said these words, he drew his wife's arm fondly within his own, and walked away.

It was thus that Katharine, coming downstairs with her bonnet on, saw them, and scornfully observed to herself what a simpleton Walter was making of himself with his young wife. She and Georgina had at last fought themselves into something like a truce, and the victim they offered up on the occasion was Monica. She was the point upon which they at last agreed, and Katharine, under her artful cousin's influence, was rapidly forgetting her good-nature, and her ladylike feeling, in a childish and unworthy jealousy of her brother's wife.

Meantime Alice and Miss Connor spent a wretched afternoon ; the neglected lessons were struggled through somehow, and then Miss Connor proposed a walk. That Alice objected was only considered of a piece with the rest, waywardness not to be yielded to, so Miss Connor insisted, and Alice, weary, feverish, and with her throat becoming worse, went upstairs to get ready for it.

As she was going towards her own room, it chanced that she caught sight of the maid Thomson not far before her ; the girl paused before entering her mistress's room, and held her hand to her side ; it was but for a minute, but time enough for a struggle and a fall.

With Walter's words in her ears, and the sign of the girl's suffering before her, Alice's first impulse was to speak to her ; but quick as thought sprung up the fatal barrier of pride. What ! confess to a servant. Betray herself ! Never ! and in the old way that it has been ever since the world began, she lifted her head up with a fancied dignity and passed on.

That was the turning point. She went down reckless. Miss Connor, used as she was to her pupil's wayward moods, was astonished by her rapid change of manner—

the languid step, the moodiness was gone. She appeared obliging, amiable, talkative. It was impossible not to be carried away by her amusing rattle, and, in spite of herself, and a suspicion that it was all put on, Miss Connor yielded to the influence, until, as they were returning from their walk, Alice said something, so daring in its drollery, that Miss Connor felt herself obliged to say, "Do not think me a skeleton, my dear Alice, but I must ask you if it is quite seemly of you to give way to such an excess of mirth, until you are sure that you are forgiven by those whom you have certainly offended."

"No ; I do not think it is," was the ready answer, given in a subdued yet candid tone, that greatly comforted, whilst it surprised, her anxious friend.

It was a sudden pull-up, as Alice would have herself described it, from which she could not easily recover, if, indeed, she had wished it ; but that is doubtful, for now, as they neared the house, she was for the first time beginning to reflect, and to regret her conduct. She could not help thinking now how very unpleasant it would be if Walter really fulfilled his threat ; and though her feelings could not have been dignified by the term of penitence, it is pretty sure that if Thomson would but have appeared in the garden, Alice would no longer have hesitated in speaking to her. But, alas ! the opportunity does not often come a second time when we have thrown it away ourselves, and Alice could only determine to ask Matty to help her to find the maid the moment she got into the house.

What, then, was her surprise and horror, when she entered the hall, to meet her brother Walter, with his riding-whip in hand, just returned from his expedition. She started, and turned pale. Walter came up to her at once, and, in a low voice, asked her if she had done

what he desired. "No," said Alice, her courage rising with the necessity.

"Have you had an opportunity?" said Walter, willing that she should yet escape.

"Yes," said Alice, boldly.

Walter looked disappointed, but he said, "Then wait here with me," and Miss Connor walked away.

They had not to wait long; Mr. Swinton came almost directly, tall, cold, stern as usual.

"Uncle," said Walter, "will you give me a few minutes." He opened the library door, and led the way with Alice. Mr. Swinton followed, heard the short history without moving a muscle of his face, shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, "What a pleasant little entertainment you have provided for me!" and then said in his ordinary tone, calm and expressionless, "Leave Alice with me, Walter. As her mother is not able to attend to the matter I will speak to her. Perhaps you will return in a few minutes."

A few minutes sufficed, it appeared, for at the end of that time the bell was rung, and Walter, Miss Connor, and the maid were summoned. Before them, openly and without reserve, the confession was made, and then Alice retired with Miss Connor, and Thomson was retained to receive some severe censures on her folly and senseless fears.

The girl was so overcome by surprise at what she had heard, the sight of the young lady's humiliation, and the unusual circumstance of a reproof from her master, that she nearly went into hysterics again, as soon as she had got safely out of Mr. Swinton's hearing. It required all the sensible care of Patience and the other maids to get her into suitable condition for attending her mistress in time to dress for dinner, and then her eyes were swollen, and her fingers so trembling

that she immediately attracted Mrs. Swinton's notice, who said, "What is the matter now, Thomson? Have you seen another ghost?"

"No, ma'am," said Thomson, colouring, and endeavouring to braid her mistress's hair.

"What then?" asked Mrs. Swinton, observing her confusion in the looking-glass.

"Oh, ma'am, it was no spirit at all," replied the maid; "but one of the young ladies, ma'am, Miss Alice Bruce, I think; and she was so extremely agitated, for she had to tell me how it was, and Mr. Swinton was so cross with me," and the speech finished in Thomson putting her apron up, and giving an hysterical sob.

Mrs. Swinton turned round much more quickly than was her wont, and sharply demanded an explanation; her husband's interference was such an unusual circumstance, that she felt sure that something important had been going wrong.

Thomson had not much more to tell. All the servants were of opinion that it had only been a little fun—Miss Alice was so lightsome—and what had put her about more than anything else was the thought that she had been the means of bringing the poor young lady into trouble, and herself to be brought before her master, too, exactly as they brought the poachers and people up before him at home.

Mrs. Swinton did not care the least for Thomson's feelings upon either of these points, but she was sufficiently interested in the matter to leave her toilet in the midst, and go to her daughter's room, where she began with, "Surely there never was such a strange, unquiet household as this, from top to bottom;" upon which Georgina begged to know if any one else had rolled downstairs, or what had happened now.

Whilst the affair was being thus discussed in most parts of the house, Mrs. Bruce alone was quite ignorant of it. She was now sitting quietly in her own room, with Tommy, still languid and glad to be petted, on her knee, and Minnie playing near.

Monica and Margaret, too, all unconscious, were having a walk together under the sycamores in the garden. Monica had proposed it after their drive, and Margaret had agreed with delight. She had had a letter that morning from Cherry Hawkins, and she was now dilating upon it to her new friend, and Monica was listening with good-natured interest.

"I wish that you could see Cherry," said Margaret, warmly. "I will tell you what I think she is like; a frosty day when the sun is shining very brightly. She is so clear and warm that it quite invigorates one to be with her."

"I hope that I shall see her some day," said Monica, smiling. "It is very nice for you to have such a friend."

"Ah, it is," assented Margaret, with something like a sigh; "but I often wonder how it is that Cherry likes me so much; for I am sure if she is like sunshine, I am like a November fog."

"Nay, my dear Margaret, you wrong yourself," said Monica, laughing. "At any rate, if it were true, I hope that you would not be content to sit down for life in that gloomy character."

"What can I do, Monica?" said Margaret, "you do not know how I sometimes long to be different from what I am. I sometimes feel as if I could do anything; as if I should like to save somebody, or to bear some dreadful misfortune, or to be immensely clever, or to go out as a missionary, or to be anything but myself; and then, all at once, I am roused up by hearing Miss Connor say, 'Margaret, you have not crossed a single t

in your whole exercise,' and then I am stupid, headachy, and ready to give up entirely. I wonder why I have told you all this; but I thought before you came that you would be the one to help me."

"That I would, if I could, my dear sister," said Monica, in the most loving way; "but, Margaret, dear, do you know, whilst you were speaking, I could not help thinking of the story in the Bible of the man who wanted to be cleansed of his leprosy. 'If it were some great thing, wouldst not thou have done it?' It is the same often with us; we wish to do some great thing; we are restless, ambitious, and anxious; and we think that the work that is set before us is tiresome, uninteresting, stupid, small. It is the right foundation that is wanting, the right motive for all. Ennobled by this, the smallest work is of great value in the sight of heaven, without it but the bricks of Babel, destined to be consumed."

"I know," said Margaret; "I have often thought a great deal about all this, often until my head has ached; but, oh, Monica, it only makes me feel how different I am from what I ought to be; they say I am clever, but I had fifty times rather be good, like Cherry."

"My dear Margaret," said Monica, "pray do not fall into the error that cleverness and goodness must needs clash. Talents are but like hands and feet, God's gifts, to be used in doing His will. Goodness consists in using them aright; body, soul, and spirit consecrated to Him who has given Himself for us; this alone is holiness. Once realize the mighty sacrifice that has been made for you, and you will lay down yourself in prayer at the foot of His cross who has called you. Your sins and murmurings, your strong wishes and dislikes, and envyings, will be laid down there, and then, with the Holy Spirit helping you, you may get

up to run your course, if not always joyfully, not always happily—for there may be impatience still, there may be backslidings, outward trials, and absence of inward peace—but with your feet always set in the right path; and over thorns, or amidst flowers, apparently alone, or with the blessed presence of our Lord to comfort you, you will pass through this life to the better one that you have been learning to know, to desire, and to prepare for. Ah, my dear Margaret, this is the grand work, is it not?—all others are small compared with it.”

“Yea,” said Margaret, half mechanically, for she was thinking deeply and much moved.

They were roused from their earnest conversation by the sound of the first dinner-bell.

“Thank you, Monica,” said Margaret, wakening up, and pressing her sister’s hand. “It has been very nice.”

“I did not mean to speak of such solemn things when we came out,” said Monica, as they turned their steps towards the house. “It is not good, I think, to talk often about this inner life, which should be chiefly known by the outward walk. There is danger lest in talking we neglect the reality, and plume ourselves upon more than we really possess. So let us be careful, Margaret, dear, that our little walk together may have done us both more good than harm.”

As they went upstairs they met Aunt Jane, who was, evidently, in a flustered state. She stopped them, and said, “What have you all been about, Margaret? If that poor thing, your governess, could not have seen after her, I should have thought that you had sense enough.”

Margaret was confused, she could not understand: but Monica said, “What is it? Is it about Alice?”

“Alice, yes,” cried Miss Swinton, who did not by

any means dislike Monica, but rather looked down upon her, as one who possessed nothing but a pretty face. "Here, I happen to go into the schoolroom, after I was dressed, and there I find Alice and that poor Miss Connor, sitting, half in the dark, over the fire, doing nothing; Alice, in a most ungraceful attitude, I believe, with her head upon Miss Connor's knee. She started up when I went in; the light of my candle fell upon her face, her eyes were sunk and her cheeks scarlet. I said, 'What is the matter, child!' and the moment she spoke to answer me I needed no more. She has a dreadful sore-throat: it may be fever. I have been up to tell her mother. Here she comes."

Mrs. Bruce appeared at this moment, looking alarmed and anxious. "I am sorry to hear this about Alice," said she to Monica. "I thought she was ill at luncheon, but she assured me of the contrary. I cannot imagine how she has caught cold. Do you know anything about it?"

Monica was spared the pain of answering, by Miss Swinton's saying, "Miss Connor excused herself by saying something about Alice being in disgrace, and she had thought more about that than her health. It has something to do with Louisa's maid's fright, but, really, there is such a strange mystery about everything, I am left quite in the dark."

Before her sister had done speaking, Mrs. Bruce had continued to descend the stairs, and Margaret was following, when Miss Swinton called out, "Ellen, it would be the height of imprudence to take Margaret into the room until you have ascertained what Alice really has."

"Stay away, darling," said her mother, looking back. "I will send Miss Connor to you soon."

Alarming as her sister's account of Alice had been, Mrs. Bruce did not find that it had been exaggerated.

Alice was feverish, her throat much swollen, and herself so depressed and subdued by illness and unhappiness, that she no longer attempted to conceal it. Reproaches would have been cruel. A room was prepared for her, Mr. Todd was sent for, and her mother only left her to go down to dinner.

There was no allusion to Alice before the servants, but as soon as the ladies retired to the drawing-room, Mrs. Bruce spoke of her daughter's illness, and begged Mrs. Swinton to excuse her returning to her immediately, as she naturally felt anxious about her.

"I hope it is nothing serious," said Mrs. Swinton, "but I can hardly say that I shall be sorry that her pranks this time should have a consequence that will make some impression upon her."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Bruce, looking perfectly mystified, "I was not aware."

"Is it possible that you do not know about it," said Mrs. Swinton. "Perhaps then I have done wrong in alluding to the matter, but as a mother I can scarcely refrain from telling you."

Mrs. Bruce began to be quite alarmed at all this preparation; when Monica, who was close beside them, said, simply, "It is Walter's fault, mother, that you do not know. Alice was so silly last night as to yield to the temptation of frightening Mrs. Swinton's maid. She ran downstairs after her, and into the courtyard, was accidentally locked out, and Walter found her in the garden."

"A pretty story, indeed!" cried Miss Jane, holding up her hands. "Fine doings in the schoolroom, I think."

"Mrs. Walter Bruce seems to be in all the family secrets," whispered Georgina to her cousin.

"Why was I not told all this before?" said Mrs. Bruce.

"Walter did not like to trouble you with it when you were so unwell," said Monica, "but I believe that Alice would have told you herself to-night, had she not been so ill."

"I must go to her directly, poor child," said Mrs. Bruce, quite overpowered.

"Her throat is very bad," said Miss Jane, consolingly, "I should not wonder if it is scarlet fever in the morning."

"You do not say so, Jane," cried Mrs. Swinton. "Georgina, my dear, pray do not go near the room. Oh, I trust! Pray is there any camphor in the house?"

Mrs. Bruce was already by the bedside of her suffering daughter. Alice was more feverish, very restless, and her throat so swollen that she could hardly speak. Mr. Todd had not come yet, having been absent when the messenger arrived at his house. Mrs. Bruce sent Miss Connor downstairs to get some tea, and was now, for the first time, alone with Alice. As soon as ever Miss Connor had left the room, she stretched out her burning hand to her mother, and said, "Have you heard what I did last night, mamma?"

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Bruce. "It was very wrong of you. You see what sad consequences have come upon you."

"I was an ass," continued Alice, "but it is not that only. Has not Walter told you how stupid I have been all day?"

"No, my dear, he has told me nothing."

"Ah, perhaps he won't now, when he hears that I am ill. He was rather hard upon me this afternoon, but I was provoking enough, I know. Oh, mamma! I wish it was last night at this time, and I would not do it again."

"That I am sure of, Alice," said her mother, "but

Eildon Manor.

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"A pretty story, indeed," said Mrs. Swinton, holding her hand to her forehead. "I think I shall tell all the family."

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as you cannot go back again, you must resolve to do better for the future. You will try not to let your spirits run away with you, and you will be more respectful to Miss Connor. You must do what Walter tells you too. He is in your father's place now."

"Yes, mamma, I am very sorry. Will you please tell Walter this, tell him that I am very sorry. I think I could almost lie more comfortably if I told him so myself."

"You shall see him some time to-night, my dear," said her mother, "but now you had better not talk any more, but lie quietly."

That seemed impossible to Alice; now that she had begun to talk to her mamma, she went on with renewed excitement, and at last Mrs. Bruce left the room as the only means of keeping her at all quiet.

In the gallery she met Monica, who was coming to ask if she might sit with Alice, for she said, "Even if it is scarlet fever, I am not afraid, as I have had it myself severely."

Mrs. Bruce said she should be glad if she would go to her now, but begged her not to encourage her to speak; "She wishes to see Walter, do you know where he is?"

"He has just come into the drawing-room. I will run and fetch him."

She did so, and in a few minutes came back with her husband, who hearing of Alice's request, went to her directly.

"I dare not even peep in to see the children," said Mrs. Bruce, "for fear that there should be infection. I wish that Mr. Todd would come."

"I hope that there is no fear," said Monica, "but should it be fever, dear mother, will you let me nurse her, unless—has Katharine had it?"

"No, only the boys, Walter and Wilfrid, not one of the others," answered Mrs. Bruce.

"Then say you will let me," pleaded Monica.

"You are not your own mistress," said Mrs. Bruce, with a little smile, "what will Walter say to such a risk?"

"I will show him that there is scarcely any," answered Monica, "and if I could be really useful, he would not forbid my doing it, I know."

Meanwhile Walter had gone to see his sister.

"I am sorry to find you so ill, Alice," he said, in a very different tone from the one he had last spoken to her in.

"Oh, Walter," said Alice, half raising herself in bed, and speaking with great eagerness, her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks all flushed, "I wanted to tell you that I am sorry. Will you forgive me all the things."

"That I will, my dear Alice. To see you sorry was all I wished. I am afraid that I was harsh with you this afternoon, but I could not bear to hear my poor Monica spoken unkindly to."

"No, no," said Alice, in her quick way. "It was all right. She is too good for us. Will you tell her too that I am sorry?"

"She is coming to sit beside you," said Walter, "you will find her a first-rate nurse; I tried her once, when I had a severe cold, at Geneva."

"Is she," said Alice, only half pleased. "Well, it's all right, I suppose, and it is very good of her. I have been a great ass. What must I do now, Walter, to make up for it all?"

"Say your prayers, and try to do better," said Walter, who was still bending kindly over her. "And Alice, be patient here."

"Aye," said Alice, drawing a long breath. "That is

the worst. You see I have never been ill before. I must think of Cherry. Well, thank you for coming, Walter."

"Good night, Alice. I hope you will soon be better," and then Walter went away.

There was no need for Monica to admonish Alice to keep silence, for after the first salutation, she never spoke until the welcome arrival of the doctor.

That gentleman began by declaring that the young lady had a very bad sore throat—which Alice could not resist saying, after he had gone, that he need not have come from Sonnysides to tell her—also, that it might be prudent to keep the children out of the way for the present, and that he would send her something, and call again in the morning.

Mrs. Bruce's fears were scarcely allayed by this report, and she felt much harassed to have so large a household at a time of such anxiety. Mrs. Swinton might have re-assured her, for she took the matter very coolly, gave anecdotes of fevers in her family at Oakington, how she shut the patients up in two warm rooms, with an old nurse that she kept for the express purpose of attending to such cases, and how soon the children had been well again.

Aunt Jane was not so consolatory—she prophesied the worst, and blamed everybody for the catastrophe—suggested unheard-of remedies, and frequently went into the patient's room, not remaining there, however, for more than a minute at a time, for Monica, she said, seemed just made for sitting still in that dim light, and very pretty she looked too, and though she could probably do nothing herself, she could at least call for help if it was needed.

Mr. Swinton, when he first heard of Alice's illness, privately asked Walter if she were pretending, and on

being assured that such was not the case, he said that he trusted that it would be a lesson to the young lady, and then dismissed the subject, having been too well accustomed to similar occurrences in his own family of thirteen children, to be much disturbed by this.

Katharine was more distressed than anybody ; with strong feelings and affections, as soon as she really understood how ill Alice was, it was with the greatest difficulty that she could be prevented from rushing to her room at once. It required the persuasions of aunts and mother, and finally of Walter himself, to convince her that it would be useless and imprudent, and she was obliged to content herself with inveighing to her cousin Georgina, in the latter's room, against people in general, and those who had been so harsh with poor Alice in particular.

Before she left her cousin, that young lady had contrived to insinuate that Monica must somehow be at the bottom of it all, and the knowledge that Monica had been nursing Alice the whole evening, instead of being looked upon as kindness, was considered intrusive, taking Katharine's place, and the only comfort Katharine had was in sending affectionate messages through the keyhole of her sister's door, and then, after the children had gone to bed, in going to have a long grumbling gossip with Matty in the nursery.

Matty was, however, too really good to hear any of Miss Georgina's spiteful speeches retailed without contradiction ; she was quite ready to pity Alice to the utmost, and allow that there had been too much made of the poor child's nonsense ; but, " No, Miss Katharine, it's none of Mrs. Walter's doings," she said. " He was always like his father, so strict where he thought it was right, and I see it in his eye yet. There'll be neither waste nor idleness in his house, I warrant ; and yet there's

Gresley standing near the fireplace with Monica at the moment taking hold of her hand as it were gratefully. "She has quickly become intimate with your god-mother," said the serpent beside Katharine, and the venom entered into her heart.

"Who is there?" cried Miss Lavinia. "Katharine, my dear, come in here."

Katharine could not but comply. It was the dressing-room where she had heard the story of the Wilfrid Bruce of olden time, and in which the wardrobe of coveted treasures stood. The doors were now open. "I have been showing Monica a few of my old things," said Miss Lavinia. "She admires them amazingly."

"Indeed I do," said Monica; "and look Katharine what Miss Gresley has been so very kind as to give to me."

She showed a small cross to be suspended round the neck, of beautiful and somewhat foreign workmanship, of silver, set with brilliants.

"I want to know what you think of it, Katharine?" said Miss Lavinia, her strong features beaming with the pleasure of giving pleasure.

"Pray, Miss Lavinia, don't ask me," said Katharine, hurriedly; "Monica's opinion, I fancy, will be much more to the purpose;" and her manner, more than her words, showing her intense annoyance, she walked out of the room, ready to bite her tongue the next moment for the childish way in which she had betrayed her feelings.

They did not meet again till dinner, and then Katharine blushed as she encountered her godmother's keen eye. A shade of sadness upon Monica's face, and a timidity when she once had to address herself to Katharine, were the only signs of her eyes having been opened to a sentiment towards herself of which she had not before imagined the existence.

There were no strangers of the party, partly because Sir Thomas wished to take the opportunity of talking over some affairs with Mr. Swinton and his nephew.

"Of course," said Mr. Swinton, after some little discussion upon other matters, when the gentlemen were left alone, "Walter will now reside at the Manor, and take up his position as his father's successor. The county will expect much of you, Walter."

"I hesitate about doing so," said Walter, "because, in that case, my mother has resolved to move to Maskham with the children, and in her present most delicate state of health I dread the change for her."

"Why should she move?" cried Sir Thomas. "The house is surely large enough. Keep your own horses, and my young lady her carriage, and what more can you desire?"

"That was my wish, certainly," said Walter, "but I have latterly been somewhat doubtful about its expediency. My mother, too, will not consent."

"There are certainly difficulties in the way," remarked Mr. Swinton, who generally differed from his co-executor, in opinion, regarding him, with some contempt, as a well-meaning man, quite unfit for business; "but if you ask my opinion, Walter, as regards your own movements, I say your course is plain—remain at Eildon; any other scheme would be irrational in the extreme."

Walter submitted to the decision of his friends, and the conversation was interrupted by a summons to the drawing-room. Little Tommy, as well as Alice's illness, was the reason for shortening the evening, which Miss Lavinia, reluctant to lose her guests, could not gainsay, and the ladies almost directly went to get their things on.

Katharine suspected somehow that her godmother

wished to speak to her alone ; but as the wish was not reciprocated, she most amiably helped Tommy and the girls, and contrived to dally away the time with them until the carriages were announced. But if Miss Lavinia wanted to speak to her, she was not likely to have been easily prevented from doing so, as Katharine might have known ; and so it was, that as they were going down, Miss Lavinia appeared, and saying to the children, "Get away now, Katharine shall come directly," she stayed behind with her god-daughter.

"You are ashamed of yourself, Katharine," said Miss Lavinia, "I am glad to see, so no more about it. I would warn you against the most dangerous passion that the evil one ever put into a human being's heart, but that I think you have become aware of it yourself. And if that ornament was the means of opening your eyes, so I hope that this one may be the means of keeping it in your remembrance. Your godmother had not forgotten you, Katharine ; no stranger was likely to rob you of her affection, although in time it is possible she may share it."

As Miss Lavinia spoke, she held in her hand a cross precisely similar to the one she had given to Monica, and now placing it in Katharine's hand, she turned round to avoid the blushing thanks that Katharine with the greatest difficulty was uttering, and led the way downstairs.

When they all arrived at home, Mrs. Bruce came down to meet them, looking ready to drop with anxiety and fatigue. She had had a most distressing day, and there was no doubt that she must now be prevailed upon to retire to rest.

"I may sit up to-night, may I not?" said Monica ; then remembering Katharine, she stopped, and timidly added, "or I might share it with Katharine, at least."

"I should not be at all tired," said Katharine, "to sit up all the night."

But in the end it was so arranged that Katharine was to relieve Miss Connor now, and Monica was to come at daybreak. Matty was within call, and though supposed to be in bed, was in reality watching by the nursery fire, every now and then paying little visits to the sick-room. It was a most trying night. Alice's sufferings were very great. She was herself often terrified, and Katharine, unaccustomed to illness, was not much less so; but the latter showed a sense and patience that the necessity of the occasion brought forth. She was, however, sufficiently tired, when, with the earliest gleam of daylight, Monica appeared, fresh, calm, and cheerful, ready for anything.

She required some directions, and then she begged Katharine to go and take some rest; and before Katharine left the room, she offered a kiss, with a look of such sweet humble tenderness, that Katharine could not resist it, and a silent but warm embrace dissolved the fetters in which Katharine had been held, and began a new and holier bond between them. Alice, although now almost unable to articulate, saw the little pantomime, and on her, too, it had its softening effect.

Poor Alice! for some hours more her sufferings were very great, until, at last, she obtained relief, and after that, although extremely weak, there was nothing left for her but to get well again as fast as possible.

The quinsy broke in time to prevent the necessity of putting off a dinner party which was to take place the last evening of the Swinton's stay, and for which no one felt very well prepared.

The prospect of her speedy recovery, however, cheered them up, and when the Oakington party finally took their departure, Alice was improving rapidly, much to

the relief of poor Thomson, who had repeatedly, during the last two days, sent her duty to the young lady, and her hopes that she was better.

It was the morning after the Swintons had gone, when Mrs. Bruce was sitting alone in her own room that, to her surprise, a gentle tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Miss Connor.

Mrs. Bruce had left Alice half an hour before, sitting up in an easy-chair, and apparently quite comfortable ; but she could not help an apprehension of some mischance to her when she saw Miss Connor's face so grave and sad.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked, anxiously.

"Oh, no!" replied Miss Connor, with a smile. "I am sorry that I alarmed you. It is on my own account that I came to ask for a few minutes' conversation with you."

Mrs. Bruce was much relieved, and prepared to listen to the communication that was then timidly, and not without some tears, unfolded to her. After three days' consideration, and much searching of herself, Miss Connor had come to the conclusion that she was unfit to retain the charge of the young ladies. For some time she had feared that there was a want of confidence in her, and since the late uncomfortable affair with dear Alice, she had felt that it was but just, and she would therefore beg Mrs. Bruce to allow her to relinquish her responsibility.

Mrs. Bruce was surprised, sorry, assured Miss Connor of the regard and respect they felt for her, and at last prevailed upon that lady to reconsider her determination, and, in the meantime, nothing should be said to any one ; and Miss Connor, full of affection and indecision, returned to her duties for the present.

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But in the end it was so arranged that Katharine was to relieve Miss Connor now, and Monica was to come at daybreak. Matty was within call, and though supposed to be in bed, was in reality watching by the nursery fire, every now and then paying little visits to the sick-room. It was a most trying night. Alice's sufferings were very great. She was herself often terrified, and Katharine, unaccustomed to illness, was not much less so; but the latter showed a sense and patience that the necessity of the occasion brought forth. She was, however, sufficiently tired, when, with the earliest gleam of daylight, Monica appeared, fresh, calm, and cheerful, ready for anything.

She required some directions, and then she begged Katharine to go and take some rest; and before Katharine left the room, she offered a kiss, with a look of such sweet humble tenderness, that Katharine could not resist it, and a silent but warm embrace dissolved the fetters in which Katharine had been held, and began a new and holier bond between them. Alice, although now almost unable to articulate, saw the little pantomime, and on her, too, it had its softening effect.

Poor Alice! for some hours more her sufferings were very great, until, at last, she obtained relief, and that, although extremely weak, she was no longer in danger for her but to

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the relief of poor Thomson, who had repeatedly, during the last two days, sent her duty to the young lady, and her hopes that she was better.

It was the morning after the Swintons had gone, when Mrs. Bruce was sitting alone in her own room that, to her surprise, a gentle tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Miss Connor.

Mrs. Bruce had left Alice half an hour before, sitting up in an easy-chair, and apparently quite comfortable; but she could not help an apprehension of some mischance to her when she saw Miss Connor's face so grave and sad.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked, anxiously.

"Oh, no!" replied Miss Connor, with a smile. "I am sorry that I alarmed you. It is on my own account that I came to ask for a few minutes' conversation with you."

Mrs. Bruce was much relieved, and prepared to listen to the communication that was then timidly, and not without some tears, unfolded to her. After three days' consideration, and much searching of herself, Miss Connor had come to the conclusion that she was unfit to retain the charge of the young ladies. For some time she had feared that there was a want of confidence in her, and since the late respectable affair with dear Alice, she had felt that it was best, and she would therefore beg Mrs. Bruce to relinquish her responsibility.

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wards she was in the schoolroom, certainly not yet like herself—so quiet, and weak, and unable to do many lessons, but still in the way to be quite strong again, when a letter was delivered to Miss Connor, which, after reading in an agitated manner, she folded up and left the room.

“I say, Meg,” exclaimed Alice, “what can be the matter? had you not better go after the poor thing?”

Margaret scarcely liked to go, but, after some more discussion, was complying, when the governess returned, and proceeded with the lesson she had left. Hints of curiosity from Alice were disregarded, but from that time Miss Connor became grave and strange, tender towards the girls, and never cross, though Alice, improved, and anxious to do better as she was, often tried her patience; “and it was very plain,” said the latter, “conceal it as she might, that something serious was in the wind.” “I think that mamma knows, too,” said Margaret. “And Katharine.”

“And Monica, of course, then,” added Alice; “for they have been getting such friends ever since that night. Ah! you don’t know about that night, Meg. I have never cared to talk about that dreadful time. Well, I suppose that we shall hear some day all about this.”

The some day arrived at last. One morning when, after lessons, Margaret and Alice happened to be in the drawing-room with their mamma, Miss Connor came into the room with a stranger whom she introduced as “my cousin, Miss Montgomery.” Mrs. Bruce did not appear surprised to see the lady, and, after requesting her to sit down, gave the girls a hint to leave the room.

They had time to see that the new comer was tall, very thin, was well dressed, wore spectacles, had thin

lips, and a calm, cold expression all over her ; and they heard her say, in answer to a kind inquiry from their mamma, "No ; thank you, I am not fatigued. My journey has been easily performed ;" and, though she spoke in polished accents and a courteous manner, there was a chilliness in the tone, as if all feelings, sympathies, and tenderness had been squeezed out of it.

"What a mummy !" said Alice, laughing, as they retired to their own quarters. "Where can Miss Connor have picked up such a relation ?"

"What has she come here for, I wonder ?" said Margaret.

They might wonder, but without result. No one knew ; or, if they did, nobody would tell, and Miss Montgomery took some refreshment, and drove off again, and Miss Connor returned to her pupils ; and, beyond that she was sadder than ever, her tears almost beyond repression, there was no difference.

At last Alice said, "I have guessed, Meg."

"What is it, Alice ?" inquired Margaret, anxiously.

"Oh ! my dear, don't ask me ; time enough when it comes. I could not tell you."

It came in the evening, at twilight, when they were sitting in the schoolroom-window, using the last gleam of light to prepare their lessons for next day, that Miss Connor came into the room with even a softer step than she was wont. She first put her arm round Alice, and then she said, "My dears, I am going away." She could not have made a longer speech just then.

"I knew," said Alice, springing up and throwing her arms round her. "I was sure of it to-day, and that wretch is coming to us instead of you ?"

"My cousin, my love," said Miss Connor, in the old reproving tone.

"I beg your pardon," said Alice, quickly. "But

oh! why are you going away?" And Margaret, clinging round her too, repeated her sister's question. "Will you not believe," added Alice, "that I will never give so much trouble again?"

"My dear girls," said Miss Connor, sitting down with them beside her, "pray do not make it more difficult for me to go than it is already. My brother has written to ask me to go out to him in India. I had the letter ten days ago, and I could not refuse. I knew that my cousin, who is just leaving some pupils whose education she has finished, was much more competent than I, and your mamma sent for her. The engagement is concluded, and she will come to you on the first of August, when your brother's holidays are over. She will teach you better; she cannot love you more than I have done."

That was all, Miss Connor's calmness quite gave way, and her pupil's tears were mingled with her own.

It was scarcely an aggravation to hear that she must leave them in two days, to be able to catch the steamer by which her brother had desired that she would sail, because the sooner it was over the better, and the intermediate time being fully occupied in packing and preparing, there was less time for the indulgence of their regret. It was by her own request that all who knew before had kept the secret well, for she wished to spare herself and them too long anticipation.

Monica, always considerate, offered to take the girls with Katharine and herself, one of the days, to Maskham, that they might buy some keepsakes for their friend, and Margaret was pleased by the prospect of finding some sympathy in Cherry. The first errand was well performed, but Cherry was not seen, she had gone unexpectedly with her grandmamma and Frank to the seaside, whither her papa and mamma were to join

them for their holidays, and a letter was on its way to announce the same to Margaret. This was a great disappointment, but Margaret had other interests now, and did not mope and gloom as she might have done some time ago.

The next day was Miss Connor's last, and accompanied by the best wishes of every member of the household, the mild, patient governess departed for the strange land which contained the nearest relative she had.

That day was an eventful one to Eildon, in another respect. Whilst things were unsettled by Miss Connor's going away, Mrs. Bruce thought it was a good time for speaking to her son about arrangements for the future, and she, therefore, took an opportunity, when her daughters were all out, and sent for Walter to come and sit with her. It did not take many words to tell him that, although very loth to disturb the pleasant life that they had now fallen into, it was still her determination to remove to Maskham with the children. Then Walter spoke; he had only waited for his mother to begin the subject, and now in his wife's name and his own, he begged and entreated his mother not to speak of change until they had lived as now, another year at least. Many arguments were affectionately urged, and feebly combatted by his mother, when in the midst appeared Monica and Katharine, fresh and blooming, a pleasing contrast in their youthful beauty, just returning from a walk together.

They would have moved away again, seeing Walter and his mother so earnestly in conversation, but Walter begged them to remain, and quickly explained how matters stood.

"Persuade my mother, Monica," he said.

His young wife bent one knee upon the footstool

near to Mrs. Bruce, and looking up with her truthful eyes, she said, "You will stay with us, dear mother, will you not? What should we do without you? only think. Come Katharine, help me—you have promised long ago;" until at last the mother answered, "I have always spoilt you all, you know, then Walter, I must stay and spoil you still."

And now, having led our Eildon friends through some of the ups and downs of everyday life, we must leave them, with a prospect of the same varied course before them, not however, we trust, without a better chance of running straight; a higher goal before them, than they had when we first met with them; and finish with an extract from a letter written by the faithful Margaret to her friend some three months after this.

"You need not have pitied us so very much," she wrote. "Miss Montgomery has not turned out such an ogress as Wilfrid must have described her to you. I knew that his account would be terrific, because she only came the night before he went back to school, and she was rather stiff and looked at him suspiciously. Of course, she is very unlike our dear Miss Connor. Method, she tells us, is her watchword, discipline her assistant; and good use she makes of both. Our time is portioned out exactly, and there is no promiscuous talking in the schoolroom. Dear Alice and she have had two battles, but they have now settled down into a sort of armed neutrality, and in a short time, I hope, it will be peace. I have not yet fallen under her serious displeasure, for one keen glance through the spectacles is generally enough to keep me in order for the day; and happily—for she does not like people being delicate—I have not had one bad headache since she came. I expect that we shall like her better than

we do now; the worst is that if people are kind she thinks they are pretending. I believe that she has had a great many troubles, and that has made her cold outside. You will think me romantic, Cherry, but I am sure that when she knows us all better she will believe that there is real love in the world. She need only watch our dearest Monica to know that. Oh, how nice it is to be with her and mamma, as they contrive I shall be frequently. It is so delightful having Walter and Monica always with us now. Walter takes every trouble off mamma's hands, so that she says she has nothing to do but to get strong again; and Katharine and Monica do all the rest. That is the only thing, Cherry, that now mamma does not want me so much; but, of course, it is right for Katharine to be with her, and Katharine is so quick and clever, as you know. She sends her love to you, by the bye.

"Monica goes regularly to the cottages and to Sonny-sides, and sometimes takes us with her; and we have Willy Burton twice a week to teach; and we are going to have such a delightful plan at Christmas; but you will be here then, so I will keep it for a surprise for you.

"Monica teaches Tom and Minnie every morning in her room, which is much better, because dear old Matty 'can't abide' the new governess, and wishes that we 'had got shot of her;' so there would have been nothing but unpleasantness if the children had come into the schoolroom. Aunt Jane is coming in October. Alice says that the hope of that is all that keeps her alive under the present *régime*, because there will be such fun between her and Miss Montgomery. But Alice is only joking. Our life is so far apart now from that of the rest of the house that Aunt Jane will not have much opportunity of coming in contact with our

governess. Heigh-ho, my time is over, and I must go to my Euclid. Fancy that, Cherry; I am learning mathematics, to strengthen my too subjective mind, so Miss Montgomery said; but I really like it. The sigh was not for that. Dear Cherry, I know what is better than mathematics.

“ Good bye.

“ I am, ever, your affectionate friend,

“ MARGARET ELLEN BRUCE.

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THE END.

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